

Mystery and a declaration are central to our readings today

The mystery of salvation history

The mystery of our being here today

The mystery of God's love for fallen human beings

All of this solved, in a sense, by God's declaration

The Angel Gabriel declared unto Mary

We humans declare war, we declare independence

Dogmas in the Church are declared

We even declare our love for another, all very important things

Gabriel is God's messenger

And today he declares God's love for us, for all mankind

This declaration sheds light on God's mysterious plan

But it doesn't solve it

This plan is lived by each generation

Adam and Eve lived it

King David lived it

Mary lived it

Jesus and his apostles lived it

We live it today

As we look back, we see things in a very different light

We see God's grace in our world

We see it in our lives

But it is difficult to see it in the present

We know and believe it is there

But seeing it and articulating it is almost impossible

So it helps to look back

To see God's hand in the world

We have been reading from Isaiah for the first three weeks of Advent

Today, we are getting close to the birth of Christ

And our readings change their focus

King David has taken control of most of the known world

And peace was on earth

God offers a covenant, a promise to David

David wanted to build a house for God

A physical building, but nothing more

As grand as it might be

It can never contain God

God sends Nathan to David with a promise

It is God who will build a *'house'* for David

God does not promise a grand castle

He promises a *'dynasty'*

An heir who would rule forever

We read about this within the confines of a single book

The descendants of David lived this mystery for hundreds of years

St Paul sees this mystery in hindsight as well

He did not see it at the beginning of his ministry

When he was knocked to the ground

When he was lying blind for days

But toward the end of his letter to the Romans, he writes

According to the revelation of the mystery

Being kept secret for long ages

But now manifested through prophetic writings

God has always had a plan

From the very dawn of creation

A plan revealed slowly through the prophets and Sacred Scripture

He fulfilled it partially with the birth of Christ

He will fulfill it in its entirety with the second coming

God is not afraid of time

He continues to move forward to fulfillment

His plan has key figures

We see them more clearly in hindsight

All the great prophets before Christ

All the great saints after Christ

And the pivot point of His plan: Jesus Christ

And necessary for Christ to enter this world as one of us:

His mother, Mary

The Annunciation we read about today

Gabriel comes before Mary

Declares God's message to her

Hail Mary, full of grace

Again, we read about this today

We see it depicted in plays and movies

Everything all neat and tidy

But what was it really like?

Mary is physically alone when the Angel Gabriel appears to her

**I don't know if I want to wake up in the middle of the night with
an angel overhead**

They are powerful beings

They fight off Satan and his minions

They appear before the power of God

They are not the little floaty, cutesy things we depict in art

When this same angel appeared before Zachariah

Telling him of the birth of John the Baptist

This grown man was frightened almost to silence

And in his fright, he was driven to doubt

And then this message from Gabriel to Mary

Not a beautifully chanted Ave Maria

It is declared unto her

The Angel himself deferring to her

Likely bowing before her

This is a mighty, powerful statement

The Lord is with you

Say what?

Mary was at most 15 years old

She had left home

Living by herself

Not at all the custom of the time

She was troubled and perplexed

The Angel speaks of Sacred Scripture, something Mary knew very well

He speaks of David and his heritage

And he tells her she will conceive and bear a son

In her wonder Mary doesn't doubt

It is in the context of this mystery she is aware of, she asks how?

The power of God will overshadow you

And he speaks of her cousin Elizabeth

She has conceived in her old age

Did Mary even know this?

It wasn't a time of twitter or snap chat

Not even land line rotary dial phones

To get to her cousin was a three day trip

Filled with the dangers of the day

Travelling over desert mountains

Through foreign nations

Riddled with thieves and bandits

And then what does Gabriel do?

He departs from her, leaving her once again alone

Wouldn't it make more sense for him to hang around?

Kind of like God's secret service agent

To protect her and answer any questions she might have

Show her how it would all work out

No, even in sending His only Son

God's plan is wrapped up in mystery

Bethlehem, escaping to Egypt

Presenting him in the Temple, losing him in the temple

Being there when St Joseph would die

Witnessing Jesus' passion, death and resurrection

Mary lived all of these things

Shrouded in mystery

Just as we do today

When our lives are not going as planned

When loved ones suffer from disease or accidents

When little babies die in their mothers wombs

Either by natural causes or by the hands of human beings

When devastating storms rock our land

When families are torn apart

All of the war and violence in our world

When abuses occur at the highest level of government and our Church

And in the midst of these things, blessings abound

If we are honest with ourselves:

Have you ever taken a moment to consider why the good things?

Why have I been born in a free nation?

At a time of so many creature comforts

Why am I blessed with health?

Why am I blessed with financial security?

With a job I love?

With so many friends and family?

Why so many blessings, whatever they may be?

All of this life; the good and the not so good

All wrapped up in mystery as we travel through it

Yes, we can look back and it becomes a bit clearer

But in the now, we all live our own annunciation

May we have the grace to respond with Mary:

Behold, the handmaid of the Lord

Be it done to me according to your Word