MU LADY DAY 240312

Mary was on the cusp of adulthood – probably in that period of life when one swings constantly between child and adult. At one moment as we sometimes say – 15 going on 35 – at others quite the opposite – an adult who is capable of being extraordinarily childish. And of course the surging of the hormones and the physical changes of adolescence play their part.

Into that turbulent and changing phase of life comes this moment of revelation. The angel Gabriel arrives and greets her as ‘favoured one’ Just think about that for a moment – what it means when so many people do not feel favoured. Not privileged but favoured. Think about all the people who feel unfavoured – for reasons of race, colour, sexuality, economic hardship, culture. And then of course there are all the people who feel unfavoured because of how life is – illness, bereavement, unemployment, depression. Pretty much all of us some of the time.

Mary is ‘favoured’ And Gabriel sketches out a picture of how impossibility may become possible. It’s not necessarily good news because of what people may think but Mary moves from incredulity to acceptance. She doesn’t laugh like Abraham and Sarah; doesn’t claim a speech impediment like Moses; doesn’t swim in the opposite direction like Jonah. She listens, reflects and accepts.

There is a transformation here – and it is a transformation which is for every faithful disciple. Just to say that Mary listens and obeys doesn’t do justice to the journey she has to make – which the space between ‘How can this be?’ and ‘Let it be with me according to your word.’ If you forget about that space, Mary just becomes a pawn in a sort of divine play – she is actually marginalised and isn’t able to be a real and responsive person.

Your MU theme for this year is ‘Discover and Celebrate Gifts’ I suppose that our first thought is that it is we who do the discovering. But if you look at this story of Mary, it is God who does the discovering, God who arrives in the presence of the angel and declares favour, God who calls and invites – and turns impossibility into possibility.

In my own faith-understanding, one of the things which I am increasingly understanding to be the sign of the presence of God is the ability of people to do an extraordinary amount with almost nothing. People who for some reason deep inside them step forward, careless of what others think, unconcerned by questions of possibility and impossibility and simply get on with doing what God calls them to.

So your theme becomes a way of looking at God’s people – Greeting Favoured One – says God to each and every one of us. Mary’s movement in response to that greeting was from peasant girl to prophet; from Mary to Mother of God, from denial to discipleship. Our movement is nothing less – maybe a calling to a new kind of service even though we may not quite know how to carry it out; to a new kind of openness even though we don’t know how we shall be received; to a new kind of uncertainty even though we may be at a stage in our lives when we crave and feel entitled to certainty and predictability.