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### Imagine

Close your eyes and imagine, for a moment, you are 14 years (maybe it's been awhile since you've identified with those numbers, but I have faith you can recall that time in your life). Now imagine you are living under the rule and authority of a dominating foreign nation, one who invaded and overtook your homeland. You belong to a humble but proud family. You aren't rich by any means, but you have what you need, and no more. And, now after a few meetings, and the approval of both families, you have just received a proposal for marriage, with a ring. A ring which will bring security, safety, and a future for yourself and your family. And, while life isn't perfect, it's good. Things are aligning as they should be. And, for this you are so thankful, because for the most part, life has not been easy. Between the emotions of teenage angst, the necessity of keeping your head down and not attracting the wrong kind of attention, and the pressure of maintaining your family's good name, life has been a bit stressful, as stressful as it can be for a young teen at least. And, the outlook on certain days has felt somewhat bleak, as it often does when experiencing the angst that comes with adolescents. But, not today, no today is the day you find that it is all coming together. The stars are aligning, the odds are beginning to turn in your favor. Until, that is, you are greeted with the most astounding and inconceivable news. The news that you are no longer concerned simply with your own future, but now the future of the unborn child, who, as you have been told, you are harboring within your young and barely developed womb. A child who could potentially upend your entire life, if not quite literally end it. Being that the year is around 3BC and the punishment for carrying a child out of wedlock is death by stoning. How would you feel? What would you do? Where would you turn?

I will tell you, I would most likely feel mad, nauseous, terrified, and to put it mildly completely out of control. I wouldn't know what to do, or where to go. Do I confide in the man I am about to commit my life to, because that's an attractive proposal? Do I run to my family, who only just now is beginning to view me as a capable and responsible young lady? While I am not totally sure how I would respond, what I would do, or where I would turn, I do know, from our texts today, how Mary did (at least how it is recorded). As she responds to the Angel's proclamation with these words, "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior; for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant." In the midst of all the feelings and emotions, the fear and the angst, the overwhelm and the shock, her response is... joyful praise, renewed faith, and true hope in what this means both for her and for ALL future generations. It's both preposterous and wondrous all at the same time! Which is probably the most logical response when an Angel from God greets you to tell you that the cells of the Almighty are beginning to divide and grow within the organs of your own body.

There is this sense that Christmas is a holiday wrapped in the beauty of tradition. More so, maybe, a season of domesticated bliss, as we trim our trees, deck our halls, and tie each gift with a perfect bow. But, if we look at its quite literally humble beginnings, say from Luke's Gospel, we find something very different, something more subversive, something may I dare say disruptive to the entire status quo of everything we ever knew. As a (and I quote) "lowly servant" is shown the favor of the Almighty Lord our God! Turning everything on its head, "giving mercy to those who fear him;" "scattering the proud in their conceit," "casting down the mighty from their thrones." As God in turn "lifts up the lowly... fills the hungry with good things... and sends the rich away empty." All in order to fulfill the Divine's promise of mercy! That, according to Mary, the Mother of Jesus, whose Birth we will celebrate this evening, is what Christmas is all about. It's about, as the angel tells us, the fact that, "nothing", not a virgin birth, not an upstanding man taking a pregnant woman as his wife, not a simple teen from a small town becoming the mother of Divine, NOTHING "will be impossible with God." Like Mary, today we are invited not only to "proclaim the greatness of the Lord," but even more so to join her as our "spirits rejoice"! Because, we like Mary can take part in the good news and more so the miracle that God has come to dwell among us and within us. In order that we too might take part in the work of birthing the Divine into the world, and showing God's promise of hope, joy, peace, and love with those around us!