EPISCOPAL DIOCESE *of West Texas*

CHRISTIAN FORMATION

Songs of Advent

2026 Advent Devotional

4th WEEK OF ADVENT

Daniel Rentfro

READ

Luke 1:26-30

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

LISTEN

Gabriel's Message by Sting

Album: Very Special Christmas Album

Youtube Link

Spotify Link

REFLECT

N. T. Wright and Samuel Wells, two of our finest Anglican theologians, analogize the Christian story to a great five - act drama, beginning with creation, running through the chronicles of the Old and New Testament, continuing with the history of the Church, and culminating in the arrival of the Kingdom. In Luke Chapter 1, the curtain rises on the center of that drama, the story of Jesus.

Luke's is the most cinematic of the four gospels. Many scenes found only in Luke would make wonderful set pieces in a stage play or film: Gabriel's foretelling the birth of John the Baptist, the angels announcing the Messiah's birth to the shepherds, Simeon and Anna recognizing baby Jesus as their savior, the adolescent Jesus in the temple, the encounter with Zacchaeus sitting in a tree, the road to Emmaus.

The annunciation to Mary by the angel Gabriel tops the list. Many people, including Pope Francis, have called this the turning point of human history. If I were filming this scene, my soundtrack would be the (Anglicized) Basque folk hymn (# 265) "Gabriel's Message:" not a choral rendition, but rather Sting's version from the first *Very Special Christmas* album.[1] The whole song has an air of mystery about it. But listen to the percussion. The first verse has a drum pitter-pattering at four beats a second or more in the background. Angel wings flapping? Perhaps. Mary's racing heart? More likely. She is, after all, hearing a creature with eyes of fire tell her that she's about to give birth to the Messiah.

Then listen to the percussion at the end. Tap tap **BAM**, tap tap **BAM**. What in heaven's name is that? Gabriel banging his staff, setting the seal on his message? A sound effect or stage direction, the door slamming behind Gabriel as he leaves, announcing the end of the old age and commencement of the new? Or is it the sound of a hammer driving nails into a cross, reminding us of the next great crux of human history – "the day the revolution began" as Bishop Wright titled his book on the crucifixion? Or even Jesus banging on the stone from inside the tomb, commanding the stone to roll away so that He can re-enter the land of the living?

I say that drumbeat carries all of that. This is the true Good News of Christmas. Not just that a child is born unto us, but that the child will endure all the evil that the world can throw at it and abide with us forever in love, a light for an all-too-often dark world. And all this depended on a young virgin saying "yes." No wonder her heart raced.

---

[1] Note: Sting performs "Gabriel's Message" on his video *A Winter's Night*, filmed in Durham Cathedral. The video is lovely and worth a look this Christmas season, but the arrangement of "Gabriel's Message" is different and doesn't have the effect described here.

WONDER

1. I wonder what it feels like to suddenly know that your life is about to change, forever.
2. Think about a time when you got wonderful news that was nevertheless a bit scary.
3. According to Bishop Wright and Rev. Wells, all of us are players in the Christian drama, trying to figure out what our role is. Reflect on what your part might be. Is it a speaking, or a silent role? Or part of the crew?

PRAY

Almighty God, who has a part waiting for each of us, You sent your angel Gabriel to call on a young, unmarried woman to bring your Son our savior into the world. Let your Holy Spirit come upon us also, so that when You call on us to play our role in your great drama, we may answer, “Hear I am, the servant of the Lord.” And may your Son reign in our hearts forever. Amen.