



WHO
WE ARE

FUMC PORTSMOUTH A RECONCILING CONGREGATION

We, the congregation of the First United Methodist Church of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, are dedicated in worshipping, learning, and serving with all people as we embrace Jesus Christ's message of love and acceptance. As a United Methodist Church we stand fully behind the statement "Open Hearts, Open Minds, and Open Doors". We celebrate our diversity and invite all persons regardless of age, gender, racial or ethnic background, sexual orientation, marital or socioeconomic status, nationality, physical or mental ability into full membership and participation in the life of this community of faith.



New England Annual Conference Tri-State District
The Rev. Sudarshana Devadhar, Bishop
The Rev. Taesung Kang, District Superintendent

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
129 Miller Avenue - Portsmouth, NH 03801
Office Phone 603-436-6038 office@fumcportsmouth.net
Pastor office hours - Tuesday and Thursday 9 am - 12 pm
[call to ensure availability]
Pastor - Rev. Dr. Debra J. Hanson

Check out our website at www.fumcportsmouth.com

Like and Follow Us On:   

Unspeakable Joy



December 8, 2019
FUMC Portsmouth, NH

We Gather for Worship

Prelude & Entrance of Christ's Light

Gratitude Moments

***Call to Worship**

L: We gather together with the confidence that God is here.

P: Sometimes God surprises us with an unexpected message.

L: Sometimes God calls us beyond our comfort zones.

P: Let us be open to the movement of the Spirit today as we worship our God together.

***Hymn** "Like a Child" TFWS #2092

Lighting the Advent Candle The Sillanpaa Family

**A Time for the Child in All of Us
Ministry of Music**

Prayer (unison)

Gracious God, you sent the angel Gabriel to tell Mary that she would be the mother of Jesus. We understand her confusion and surprise because sometimes you startle us with your presence, too. Yet we give you thanks that you chose a young woman who was willing and ready to take that responsibility in spite of so many odds against her. Help us to learn from her, to listen and respond with "yes" when you call us, and help us to trust in your presence and assurance that we are not alone on the journey. Amen.

Sung Response "Emmanuel, Emmanuel" UMH #204

We Proclaim the Word

Reading the Word Luke 1:26-45

L: The Word of God for the People of God.

P: Thanks be to God.

Message "Mary, Finding Peace, Creating Joy"
Rev. Dr. Deb Hanson

We Respond to God's Word

***Hymn** "To a Maid Engaged to Joseph" UMH #215

Prayers of the People

Silent Prayer and Pastoral Prayer

The Lord's Prayer (unison)

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Giving of Our Tithes and Offerings

***Doxology** (*Please join in singing the following*) UMH #94

Praise God from whom all blessings flow; Praise God, all creatures here below; Alleluia! Alleluia! Praise God, the source of all our gifts! Praise Jesus Christ, whose power uplifts! Praise the Spirit, Holy Spirit! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

***Prayer of Dedication** (unison)

We give from the abundance we have, gracious God, and we pray that our offerings will make a difference in our community and our world. Amen.

We Go Forth to Serve

***Hymn** "What Child is This?" UMH #219

***Choral Benediction** (*Congregation encircles the Sanctuary*)

May the Lord, gracious God bless and keep you forever. Grant you peace, perfect peace, courage in every endeavor. Lift up your eyes and seek His face, and His grace forever. May the Lord, mighty God bless and keep you forever.

***Pastor's Charge**

Postlude

**Please stand as you are comfortable*

*TFWS = The Faith We Sing UMH = United Methodist Hymnal
Large print bulletins are available from the greeters*

Welcome!

Whether you are joining us for worship for the first time or after many years of attending here at First UMC, we want you to know that you are welcome!

We are an inclusive community that invites everyone to be part of our church fellowship. Thank you for being here, and we hope that you have had a meaningful experience of worshipping our God so you leave this place feeling that you have been blessed to be a blessing. Please join us again!

Rev. Deb Hanson

Pastor - Rev. Dr. Debra J. Hanson
Pastor's Assistant - David Richards
Liturgist - Dave Atkinson
Lay Leader - Susan Sarosiek
Acolyte - Alexa Lange
Director of Music - Bevan Bloemendaal
Greeters - Dave & Sue Richards
Ushers - Al & Jan Cansdale
Sound Tech - Sue Sarosiek
Worship Service Tech - Steve Scott
Photographer - Dave Atkinson
Sunday School - Aerial Sillanpaa & Kaya Sarosiek



WE LIFT UP IN PRAYER...

Rev. Charles & Anona Hartman
Dan Strange
Ken Young
Rev. Bill & Gayle Gardei
Marion Collishaw
Sylvia Bartlett
Gil Stebbins
Woodie Lange
Jim New
Bobbie Noble
Barbara Glidden
Judy Doyon
Charles Gilman
Ruth Griffin
Jim Slater
Barbara Sylvester
Barbara Millar
Barbara Clement
Yvonne Griffin
Our Denomination
Our Church Family



Come join us for coffee hour after church service in Sanborn Hall. We'd love to catch up.



UPCOMING EVENTS

12/8 - Camp Wanakee open house will be in Sanborn Hall from 5-8 pm. All are welcome.

12/10 - The Peace Circle lunch will be held at the Dinnerhorn. It is set for 12 pm. This is a final date and time.

12/10 - The Finance Trustee meeting will be held at the Parsonage at 6 pm. Supper will be included!

12/11 - Service at Wentworth Senior Living at 11 am. There will be caroling. All are welcome. Please come to help.

12/15 - The Giving Tree is up. The deadline for the wrapped gifts to be returned is December 15th. Please attach red bell to each gift. One of the families on the list for the Giving Tree is looking for two bureaus - they can be used. If anyone has any of these items to donate, please contact Sue Sarosiek.

12/22 - This will be the Children's Pageant. This year it is The Shiniest Star. The children have been working hard on this so please come to the service to enjoy and see the finished results of their dedication.

12/24 - Christmas Eve service will begin at 7 pm.

There are only a few hand painted Christmas ornaments featuring FUMC in the office for sale at a price of \$14. Please feel free to drop in and see them. It might be just what your holiday tree needs.

FRIENDLY REMINDERS

Donations are being accepted for computer updates. Computers are used in the office, our financial systems, our worship service and the Narthex. The amount needed for this upgrade is \$2,000. Please prayerfully consider donating to computer upgrade. Thank you.

Church Conference News

Please pick up your Church Conference booklet in Sanborn Hall. They are alphabetical by last name.

In Thanksgiving to East Coast Heating!





SERMON TRANSCRIPT GIVEN BY
REV. DR. DEB HANSON

SCRIPTURE: Luke 1:26-45

THEME: Mary answered God’s call to be a mother, prophet, and woman ahead of her time.

“Mary, Nazareth Girl” (poem by Ann Weems, p. 25 from *Kneeling in Bethlehem*)

Mary, Nazareth girl:

What did you know of ethereal beings with messages from God?

What did you know of men when you found yourself with child?

What did you know of babies, you, barely out of childhood yourself?

What did you know of God that brought you to this stable blessed among women?

Could it be that you had been ready, waiting, listening, for the footsteps of an angel?

Could it be there are messages for us if we have the faith to listen?

What about this Mary? What WAS it that God saw in her to call her to be the mother of God’s Son? There is so much we DON’T know from reading the story of the annunciation in Luke 1. In a few short verses, this young teenager – possibly even twelve years old – was called from playing with her friends and helping her mother to carry a tremendous responsibility. In those verses, she is visited by an angel, told she was chosen, questioned the angel, and then accepted the call. We can make this into a meek and mild Mary like some of our Christmas carols seem to do, but I think there is much more to discover when we read between the lines.

Being a teenage – or almost teenage – girl in those days wasn’t like today. The girls were trained by their mothers to learn how to be a good wife and mother, so they learned the household duties, helped with the younger siblings, and were betrothed without their own consent, usually to an older man who would take her as his wife. They were expected to have children, preferably sons, so we can see that the girl grew up very fast! I’m sure the mother and other women in the household would have spent a great deal of time instructing the girl on what was expected, knowing that, as soon as she was married, she would then become a part of the man’s household and his “property,” leaving her family behind. Even though they probably still saw each other and had conversations, she would not be considered part of her biological family any more.

In addition to the preparations that went into raising a girl for marriage, there was also religious instruction that would have gone on in the home and the synagogue. Females were relegated to the back of the synagogue or temple, separated from the males, and not formally trained; most could not read or write, but many had common sense and wisdom. Being a person of faith wasn’t a choice for anyone but a way of life. There was no question that God was with them, only the wondering at times about how God was working in their lives.

So, Mary’s parents worked with Joseph to arrange a marriage for their daughter. Once a contract was established, the daughter and man were considered engaged to be married at the appropriate time. This would be whenever the daughter was able to bear children. If she became pregnant either through premarital relations, rape, or incest, she was considered unclean, tainted and could have been stoned to death or certainly outcast, disowned by her family and community, and shunned.

It is into this environment and these circumstances that the Angel Gabriel came to the very young Mary with the message that she would become the mother of God's Son. Many of us have experienced the excitement of learning that there was a pregnancy in the family – our own, our children, other family member or friend. Most often, there is celebration and joy at the news, and the anticipation of the child's arrival is a happy time of preparation.

But here, we can only really guess at Mary's reaction to this kind of news. One commentator wrote his reflections: "*Oh but my parents are going to kill me. She was unmarried. Promised to a man. How could she do this without disappointing everyone? Ev-er-y-one. Her father. Her mother. Her aunts and uncles. Her rabbi. The people of her town. She lived in a small town—one of those places where everyone knows everything about every single person. Oh, the things people would think about her. And if those thoughts turned to anger, and anger turned them to God's righteous laws, she could be stoned to death.*" (Rick Morley, found at Text This Week under commentaries for today's passage)

I doubt that Mary really sat passively with calm acceptance when Gabriel broke the news to her. All these things and much more must have flown through her head. Finally, she would have found the words to ask, "But how can this be since I am a virgin?" The writer of the gospel of Luke gives the story to us in the Reader's Digest version, but think about all Mary had to consider. Have you ever had to make a difficult decision in a few minutes? How does your mind deal with all the consequences, pros and cons, and implications of the decision? And, for Mary, at the age of twelve without a lot of life experience, we can only imagine how confusing and puzzling this amazing announcement would have been.

I wonder how long Gabriel stood and waited for her to process all of this. Maybe she stood and paced or looked out the window. After all, it isn't a common occurrence to have an angel of God visit you with that sort of calling! We are beginning the time of year in the United Methodist Church when pastors will start receiving calls to move to a new pastoral charge. For years when this time of year arrived, I would have nightmares about a shady figure hovering in the background, and I had the feeling that something bad was going to happen. The one year I DIDN'T have dreams about moving was the year I actually was called.

Why would this upending of lives happen? If pastors spend any time at all with their congregation, gets to know them, is invited to be part of their lives, there is a trust and bonding that happens. When the call comes for a pastor to move on, they are uprooted from the friends they have made, the connections they have developed, and everything they had built in their lives at that point. That is one reason why in the early Methodist Church, pastors were often only appointed for a few years at a time. It has been in the last twenty years or so that the New England Annual Conference bishops have tried to leave pastors in their parishes for a longer period of time because they realize that churches can benefit from the stability and consistency that provides, as long as the relationship with between pastor and congregation is a healthy one.

Even though the congregations feel the impact of the move, they still have each other and can continue as a group. The pastor is pulled out and dropped into a whole new context, new everything. Dave and I discovered that when we moved from Hampden to Dayton, ME. It was *at least* a year long adjustment, because I had served in Hampden for ten years. Fortunately,

we adjusted and moved forward, but the decision was difficult. In the end, we agreed to the move because I felt that there was something God was calling me to do with the two smaller churches in that area. I served there ten years, and they weren't always easy, but in the end, I'm very glad I persevered. Anyone who has moved for a job or gone into a new situation understand that feeling of disorientation and disruption, and then rebuilding.

For Mary, her decision to accept God's call may have been the realization that it was **GOD** who called her, and she trusted that God would not abandon her. After all, it was God's Son that she would be carrying. She stepped into a dark hole of uncertainty, anxiety, and fear with the knowledge of all that went with it. How was she able to do this? I think one answer is that Mary trusted God. She trusted God to be there in everything. Why would God call her to such a life-changing responsibility and then abandon her? No, that is not how God works.

Mary was the model of a true disciple. She was called to the prophetic task of giving birth to and raising Jesus, the very Son of God. Her "yes" to God is the embodiment of faith and living faithfully. Lest we think that she was passive or meek, we can read her song of praise called the "Magnificat" which is what she says when she goes to stay with Elizabeth:

From the Good News Version (Luke 1:47-55)

"My heart praises the Lord; my soul is glad because of God my Savior, for he has remembered me, his lowly servant!

From now on all people will call me happy, because of the great things the Mighty God has done for me.

His name is holy; from one generation to another he shows mercy to those who honor him.

He has stretched out his mighty arm and scattered the proud with all their plans.

He has brought down mighty kings from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away with empty hands.

He has kept the promise he made to our ancestors, and has come to the help of his servant Israel.

He has remembered to show mercy to Abraham and to all his descendants forever!"

These are words of a prophet – there is no meek and mild in them, and humble acceptance of being given the privilege of being the mother of Jesus. She has the vision that we see in Jesus' ministry, and I suspect she was a huge influence on how he cared for the poor, outcasts, ill, and marginalized. She speaks of justice for all, and she recognizes the inequities in her world. Her answer to Gabriel, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord" was an acceptance of a much larger calling, and it may have been her solid grounding in her faith, the recognition of the responsibility she had been given, and a life of faithfulness to Joseph, to Jesus, and to God that carried her through.

We see her in Luke's gospel at Jesus' birth; she is there with him at a wedding in Cana of Galilee for his first miracle; she knows where he is, and in the other gospel accounts, shows up periodically; she is at the foot of the cross when he is crucified and once again holds him in her arms, even as she did when he was a baby; and she was in the Upper Room with the disciples after his resurrection. Mary was part of his life throughout his time on earth. She was a faithful follower, not because he was her son, but because he was her Savior.

Even more than that, we learn from her about what it means to move from being a regular, ordinary person who is called by God to do something for God. We are called to become who God has called us to be, despite the challenges. Maybe we are called to connect more with people in positive and caring ways, or to listen more closely when someone needs a friend, encouragement, or a stranger needs a smile. Maybe our calling is to offer hope or acceptance or put away our tendency to find fault with someone's actions or behaviors and learn more about the person and where they are in their journeys. Maybe we are called to serve in church or participate in a mission outreach. Who knows? The possibilities are endless. The call is to remember who we are and Whose we are, following in the teachings of Jesus.

In the second chapter of Luke, we often read that Mary pondered things in her heart. Maybe her great insight and her trust in God came from her reflections on what happened around her and the ability to see God at work in those events. And she didn't stop there, she took what she had learned in her ponderings, and she taught Jesus about them. It's no wonder Gabriel's opening words were, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you!" (v. 28) Mary's faith was not passive, but active, just like our faith is meant to be.

We, too, are "favored and blessed," and we are called to whatever tasks God knows we can do in order to further the Kingdom of God on this earth. Sometimes we have to push aside or slog through the negative stuff, but when we do, we can be sure that God is with us. Like with Mary, God won't call us to something and abandon us. So, Mary found peace in her decision, and she began creating joy! We can, too.

Let us pray:

O God, thank you for Mary of Nazareth who accepted her calling to be the mother of your Son, Jesus. We know that it must have been a very hard decision for her to make, but in spite of all the hardships that went with it, she accepted and called herself blessed. May we, too accept your call in our lives and claim the blessings of being faithful to you in our service. Amen.