

# Sermon Note: The Annunciation

## First Sunday in Advent

### Introduction

As we begin our Advent series based on Adam Hamilton's book *The Journey*, we start with a story set in an overlooked village in Galilee. Nazareth is not a town with status or influence, yet this is where God's messenger steps into an ordinary day with news that changes Mary's world forever. The moment is both unexpected and intimate. Mary asks practical questions, faces a future she doesn't fully grasp, and then responds with openness and courage to God's presence. Advent begins here—quiet, disruptive, and rooted in real places with real people. This season invites us to consider how God's work can take shape in the corners of our lives that we too-often ignore.

### Illustration Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GY6Rpl4Ejfl>

*Note: Intended to be viewed up to the 4:00 mark*

In this clip from *The Polar Express* (2004), a boy receives an unexpected invitation at his doorway.

### Why This Video?

This moment in *The Polar Express* captures how an unexpected invitation can disrupt an ordinary night and challenge our sense of what's possible. The boy is skeptical about Christmas and even more so when the train appears, so his first response is understandable hesitation. He is caught between the familiar comfort of home and the uncertainty of stepping into something new. His decision to climb aboard shows his curiosity, and is brave in an understated way. The moment invites us to consider how surprising experiences can interrupt our routines and open the door to a future we don't expect.

### Video Discussion Questions

1. What stands out to you about the boy's reaction when he first hears the train outside his home?
2. How does the scene portray the tension between safety and curiosity?
3. Where do you notice hesitation in this moment, and what feels understandable about it?
4. What details do you see that signal something significant happening, even though the moment begins quietly?
5. How does the Conductor's invitation influence the boy's decision, and what does that tell us about the role of encouragement?
6. What emotions surface for you as the boy steps onto the train, and why?
7. When in your own life have you faced a choice that felt both uncertain and full of possibility?

### Luke 1:26-38 (NRSVue)

<sup>26</sup>In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, <sup>27</sup>to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup>And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." <sup>29</sup>But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup>The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have

found favor with God. <sup>31</sup>And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. <sup>32</sup>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. <sup>33</sup>He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” <sup>34</sup>Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” <sup>35</sup>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. <sup>36</sup>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. <sup>37</sup>For nothing will be impossible with God.” <sup>38</sup>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.

### Scripture Study Questions

1. Luke anchors this story in Nazareth—a town easy to overlook. How does the setting shape the way you hear Gabriel’s message?
2. Mary’s initial reaction is described as perplexity. What does her response teach us about the experience of encountering something unexpected or difficult to grasp?
3. Gabriel’s words emphasize presence before explanation. Where do you see the significance of that sequence in this passage?
4. Mary asks a direct, practical question: “How can this be?” How does this moment help you understand the role of honest inquiry in faith?
5. The passage names the Holy Spirit as the source of what will unfold. How does this influence the way you think about divine involvement in ordinary life?
6. Gabriel points to Elizabeth’s pregnancy as a sign of what God is doing. How do signs or examples from others sometimes help us trust what we cannot yet see in our own lives?
7. Mary ultimately offers a willing response: “Here am I... let it be with me according to your word.” What do you notice about the movement from uncertainty to openness in her reply?
8. The story introduces themes of courage, vulnerability, and divine presence. Which of those themes feels most alive or challenging for you right now?

### Weekly Action

Choose a part of your week that usually runs on autopilot—a daily task, routine moment, or ordinary place you often rush past. Pause there once each day and pay careful attention to what’s happening around you. Notice the people, sounds, and small details you might usually miss. This simple practice can help you open your heart and mind to unexpected moments of grace that show up in the midst of regular life, even when we least expect them.

### Prayer

Holy One, you meet us in ordinary places and speak to us in ways we sometimes barely notice. Give us the openness of Mary, the courage to listen, and the willingness to trust your presence in the middle of our daily lives. Guide our steps this week, and help us welcome the unexpected invitations you place before us. Amen.

*Disclosure: This content was developed by Rev. Bob Rhodes using AI tools in alignment with La Jolla UMC AI Usage Guidelines. In this case, AI assisted the author with ideation, initial drafting of section content, discussion-question development, tone adjustments, structural consistency, and formatting. All final text was written, reviewed, and approved by Rev. Rhodes.*