

Expect the unexpected - Sermon on Luke 1:26-38

Dear Brothers and Sisters, last month was exciting and mind changing for me. Who would have thought that I would stand here and share my first sermon, my thoughts about a Bible story with you...?

I had the chance to learn so many new things and developed a new perspective of Bible characters as I took part in the Thursday Evening Women's Bible Study with a lovely group of women. We read the women's stories and asked questions about the stories and shared our opinions and experiences. This was not only inspiring but also set me thinking. At some points I just sat there, sometimes listening and sometimes lost in thoughts.

There was that moment when I realized that I had the chance to see Bible stories in a different way, dissecting them, empathizing with the characters and understanding what I could learn from them.

It's not like I don't know the meaning of these stories, but I saw them in a completely different way. A way that changed me— what feelings those stories gave me, how they made me think more deeply. Not only did I have the chance to learn, but also to see what different Bible characters had to do with my life, our lives, how we see ourselves and what holds us together in times of worry, difficulties or decision making.

It changed so much in me that I am glad I had the chance to be a part of this group.

The story I would like to share with you is the part of the Christmas story where Mary gets the news...I will call it "the news" like watching TV at 8pm on ARD and waiting for the headline...

Let's think about this young and amazing woman called Mary, a girl who was not a princess or the daughter of a rich man, who took a decision that was not just life changing for her and Joseph but also for us.

A decision that is still relevant in 2019 and for the years in the future. I probably never thought that a decision taken by one bible character would change

our lives and our believing. I mean, she took the risk of being stoned and thrown out of her house, her fiancé (*e am Ende aussprechen*) may have left her as the baby was not his. I know this was God's baby, but still, would you have believed her? Mary the nobody, the non-princess, pregnant by God, best joke ever. She could have been alone in this situation.

But let's start from the beginning:

In Luke 1:28 Mary was visited by the angel Gabriel and she was a bit surprised and amazed by the greeting of the angel. "Rejoice, highly favoured one, the Lord is with you, blessed are YOU! among women!"

Hmmm...

Highly favoured?

Why was she highly favoured, what had she done to be that?

Blessed among women? Why her?

This greeting alone brings up many questions.

I always took the story as it is, it's a young woman called Mary and she was the one – Merry Christmas, Amen.

But there is this young woman called Mary, unmarried and let's hope happy with her life. She had everything a young woman of her times would be happy to have... She would never have dreamt about being highly favoured by God I expect. Would never have thought that an angel would come to her with news from God.

I mean, just think about your daily life. You get up early in the morning and do the things you do every morning as is normal for you, God sees something in you that makes you highly favoured, isn't that crazy?

But let's continue with **Luke 1:30-37** ... the meeting and conversation between the angel and Mary.

So there comes this angel called Gabriel from nowhere and tells Mary "you are the chosen one"

Let me be honest with you, I had never really thought about this story properly– it was a story I have been brought up with and I know well but have never really thought about deeply.

→ Angel appears - Mary pregnant - Mary on a donkey - Jesus in a manger
- Merry Christmas, hallelujah, Amen. (*übertreiben*)

But now, there are some things that go through my mind:

The angel appears, and Mary was fine with it?!

So, this angel came to her house, maybe the angel knocked at the door and looked like a familiar person to Mary, or maybe he really was a stranger, but Mary didn't feel afraid to let him in and offer him a seat...

Just imagine how long the angel could have been with Mary and for how long they talked, maybe for minutes - maybe for hours. Maybe she prepared him something to eat and gave him something to drink, to feel welcomed - we will never really know.

I think Mary had a good talk with a friend called Gabriel. Don't we all have that friend that maybe feels something is going to happen and tells you about. And in this case, it was Gabriel who told her about what he knew.

Maybe Mary fainted while Gabriel talked to her or had the highest blood pressure in her life and Gabriel comforted her with his words or maybe hugged her. Perhaps there was more to this conversation than appears in the Bible. Perhaps there is room for us to interpret more into the story but, whatever the story, she made this live changing decision not only for her and Joseph but also for the unborn special baby.

Do you think Mary had a feeling that this would change the course of history? Saying "Yes, let it happen, I am ready" would change the lives of million, even billions, of people?

That through her decision and action she gave us the chance to **HELP US GROW SPIRITUALLY?**

To believe in the unexpected – to believe that God keeps his promise no matter what?

Or had Gabriel told her, that the Son of God would one day walk on water, turn water into wine and heal the blind, did he?

Did Mary have any understanding of the importance (*e am Ende nicht aussprechen*) of the Son of God and what lay ahead for him?

Did Mary know that she would eventually lose him, that he would die on the cross but would rise again. Did she?

Did she know anything?

We will never really know what happened that day, but what we know, has affected us all.

So, there she was, our girl Mary, the chosen one, the one who was going to have the special baby, left alone in this situation! Gabriel already on his way home, said what he had to say, did his job and had already said goodbye to Mary.

So, who would believe her when she explained that an angel came and told her she would be pregnant by God would you? I wouldn't. If she came with this!

But she was lucky to have a friend or let me say a sister or a mother called Elisabeth, Elisabeth an old lady with a baby in her womb.

Both in the same silly situation...silly but what we should not forget, both bringing God into this world, without even knowing. Yes, the one too old and the other too young to give birth. Besides the age, both would be the talk of the town, the best gossip you would hear...

But they had each other, a friendship that was stronger than we could imagine. Holding and supporting each other in this moment, was by far the best thing that could happen to them...

We should also not forget, Mary went straight to Elisabeth, not to Joseph but to her. To be honest, I would have stayed home for a while, blanket over my head and would maybe cry like a baby, before running to a friend's house, but that was our brave Mary who knew what was good for her in the situation she was in.

Elisabeth was not only a friend of Mary's; she was like a mother to her – she knew that Elisabeth wouldn't send her back nor leave her alone with her worries. She knew that with Elisabeth everything was fine, that Elisabeth would welcome her with open arms and smile at her and tell her: "My daughter, with God everything will be fine, don't be afraid, show strength, share your spirit".

Maybe she would also tell her, that there was a reason why she had said "Yes!" and she should not doubt herself.

She had a friend. A friend who would walk through the streets with her, holding hands, ignoring the loud and annoying talk in the town.

But not only would Elisabeth comfort Mary but with Mary's presence Elisabeth had a friend around too. Mary would help her deal with her situation too, mutual support. I mean, this lady was old and had a man who could not talk – isn't that a big burden already? Didn't she have other problems on her mind? And then comes Mary with her "problem" isn't it too much?

With Mary at her side, she had the time to be free of worries, to share little things, to talk like good friends or mothers and daughters do, sit at the table have a cup of coffee and talk about the other ladies in town and laugh together?

So, this whole story is like the two sides of a coin – those two women stories are different, but in the end, they belong together and will roll the same way.

In the middle part I told you that Mary's decision helped us grow spiritually.

If you take the first letter of HELP US GROW SPIRITUALLY you will see that the letter H could represent the word HUGS.

Yes HUGS,

...so my little message for you today is not only to share your spirit, but to HUG people, share HUGS and by doing this share your spirit with them.

Welcome them with open arms in times of worries, comfort them and be like Mary and Elisabeth, strong and bold.

And to finish my first sermon for you

I would like to say a big thank you to my Women's Bible Study Group, thank you for sharing these intense moments with me.

For sharing your HUGS with me and helping me grow spiritually.

Amen.