



In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, "Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus.

LUKE 1:26-31

THE ANGEL GABRIEL EN ROUTE TO MARY

As you gaze on the image of the angel Gabriel, where do your eyes linger? What do you notice? Can you imagine yourself there on the journey with Gabriel, God's messenger? Angels can be difficult beings to truly appreciate. Historically, in some parts of the Hebrew scriptures, angels are described as potentially terrifying individuals: amalgamated animal bodies of varying terror with wings and other oddities. In other places, angels take on a more familiar human form but with an added transcendence that is difficult for words to capture. To complicate things further, as beings that are not bound by time, angels are privy to knowledge of both human events and Godly events in a way that we might never fully understand.

In this case, as we encounter ourselves journeying with Gabriel to the Annunciation, consider Gabriel's perspective. Having been with God since the beginning of time, and as someone who will continue to know God's goodness until the end of time, there will be much for Gabriel to communicate with Mary in their visit. Gabriel knows the story, perhaps not unlike how we do in our own time. How many times in our lifetimes have we heard the Christmas story? Of course, there is the matter of a Savior to be born, of God coming to earth in human form and as a vulnerable infant, no less. But also, there is the matter that she, an unwed teenager, will become pregnant with that Savior, and likely has countless questions as to how it will all come to pass.

Unlike Mary, Gabriel has the benefit of knowing what is to happen, and of the transformation the world will see as a result of the infant Jesus. Gabriel knows of the radical shift Jesus' life and ministry will bring to the world, and the ways in which humanity will be called to live out that shift for ages to come. Finally, Gabriel knows well God's unwavering commitment of love to God's people, it is at the essence of Gabriel's very being and is a love that also endures into our own.

As you imagine yourself there with Gabriel en route to share with Mary this unbelievable news, how do you relate? Perhaps we are like Gabriel: We know the story of what will happen and, having experienced its goodness, we are eager to live into its hope fully.

Angelic tradition reminds us that angels like Gabriel are to be understood as "ministering spirits." They are unique conduits of the divine in that while they communicate decisions of God, they are also ministers, beings intended to guide us back toward God. Angels walk with us in that which troubles us, and like Gabriel to Mary, remind us that "the Lord is with you."

Who are the ministering spirits in your life? As you continue your journey with and toward God, where in your life are you encountering Gabriel? Conversely, how are we a ministering spirit to others? How do our own words and actions serve as a reminder to others of God's unwavering commitment to us.