

It's the Quiet Ones You Have to Watch Out For

^{NRS} Luk 1:26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth,²⁷ to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you."²⁹ But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.³⁰ The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.³¹ And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.³² 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.³³ He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."³⁴ Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"³⁵ 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.³⁶ 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.³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God."³⁸ 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.

When I was a boy Chad Brooks was my best friend. In elementary school Chad and I were inseparable. We sat next to each other in school, were always buddies on field trips, always at each other's houses after school, and always having sleep overs. Chad's family was a really interesting one. His mom was a lot younger than mine- and even at my young age I could tell she had had kind of a rough life. She had a raspy voice that came from smoking two packs a day, and had dyed blond, frizzy, teased hair that made her look like a punk rocker. Chad's father died when he was in kindergarten, an accident, and even though a few years had passed, and at least two live in boyfriends had come and gone, you could tell when they talked about him, that they hadn't been able to move on just yet.

Chad's older brother, Brent, was a hell raiser. He played on the high school football team and was always staying out too late and drinking and getting into all kinds of trouble. One time I remember staying over one night when the police brought him

home after busting up a drinking party he was at. He didn't vomit in the police car, which was a good thing. I'm sorry to say that didn't hold as true for the hallway in front of his bedroom when his mom exiled him in to his room. Oh, he was full of trouble. But, he wasn't a bad kid, a mean kid. He was kind to Chad and I, even when his mom wasn't around, even though we must have been annoying. He looked after us and made sure the older kids didn't bully us too much.

Chad was just the opposite of his brother. He wasn't a wild kid. He was a shy boy. A quiet boy. He wasn't built for sports, but was thin and slight and had asthma. Chad was smart and good at school. And he loved to write. I remember being so jealous of him in the 4th grade when he wrote a poem about his father's death and he won all these school awards and even had it published in the local paper. And my poem, I don't even remember it now, but I know it was probably some fantastically average 4th grade work about a frog or a dog or what I did on summer vacation or something something, and it was hardly noticed. The nerve of them. I was so jealous, so envious. It didn't dawn on me that maybe he might have traded all his local fame just for a few more minutes with his dad. I was too young to realize that I was writing because I was told to; he was writing because he had to- and there is a world of difference between the two.

Now, between the two boys, between Brent and Chad- you would think that Dana would have been more worried about Brent. You'd think she'd be worried about Brent doing something really stupid like getting into his car after one of those parties and ruining his life and maybe somebody else's. You'd think she'd be worried about his grades and or whether he'd end up getting a girlfriend pregnant or something. You'd

think she'd be worried about that older boy, the one always getting into trouble. But I don't think she did.

No, it was her quiet boy that worried her most. You could tell from the way that she looked at him sometimes, the way she would ask him questions and then hold on to him in the silence, like she was clinging on to a life preserver. Every once in a while I heard her talk to someone, saying, "It's the quiet ones you have to watch out for. It's the quiet ones you have to watch out for." She said that a lot.

Yeah, Brent didn't worry her- she understood Brent. She knew about the kind of trouble he was getting into, she's been there, it didn't scare her. But all of Chad's quietness, all of that silence, all of that thinking and writing- it was unnerving. What was going through that head of his? What was he thinking about all the time? And what was he writing down in those notebooks of his? Even I didn't know that. His notebooks were always off limits. I imagine she found herself thinking about opening up one of those notebooks, from time to time, just to get a sense of what the boy was thinking about. But as far as I know she never did it. And not because it would be dishonest, but because maybe she was afraid of what she'd find there.

No, it wasn't the older boy that worried her, the boy in trouble all the time. It was her quiet boy. The one that was thinking all the time. It's the quiet ones you have to watch out for.

The Bible doesn't tell us anything about Mary. It tells us nothing about her family- about her parents or whether or not she had any brothers or sisters. But I tell you

what, I bet she worried her mom and dad now and again. I bet she worried them plenty. Because from what it does tell us, we know that Mary was a quiet girl, a thinker.

When the angel comes to her something very interesting happens. When the angel explodes into her world telling her that God is with her, the most interesting thing happens. Mary responds just like Zechariah does at first- and Luke says she is terrified and uses the same word to describe her as he does for Zechariah. Our translation here tries to water this down a little bit saying Mary is just 'perplexed'. There's no reason for this. According to Luke, she's as terrified as Zechariah is. But what she does next is so different, so different than that old priest.

Luke says the next thing that Mary does is to become very quiet, very still, and to think, to ponder, to contemplate just what the meaning of all this might be. And the word Luke uses here is an incredibly powerful one. Luke uses the word *dielogizomai* to describe what she's doing. In *dielogizomai* you might find the stem for our word logic, and this really helps you get the sense for this term. *Dielogizomai* means to argue, or debate- really to theologize. The Gospels only use this term a few times- the only people who *diellogozomai* are men, and they are almost always men of learning. The pharisees and the chief priests *dielogizomai* when they are trying to trap Jesus in some theological mistake. The lead disciples *dielogizomai* when they argue and debate among themselves about who should get to sit at the Lord's right hand. *Dielogizomai*, doing theology, in the ancient world this is something for powerful, intelligent men to be doing.

But you know who does it in the Gospels first? Mary. Mary, the mother of Jesus. Mary is the first theologian in the church. I know from me you'd think Barth was the first theologian, or at least the most important. No, it was this young girl. This young

girl, whose pregnant and has no husband. It's this quiet girl. This thoughtful girl. It's always the quiet ones that you have to watch out for.

We do such a bad job with Mary, don't we? We Protestants are so freaked out someone is going to think we're worshipping Mary that we basically don't talk about her at all- we just push her to the margins about as far as we can. And when we do talk about, when we do portray an image of her- it's always this nice, quiet, demur person in sedate baby blue. And yeah, this image *is* a little bit right- she is quiet. But we make Mary so *nice* and quiet- and that's a mistake. See, there's nothing nice about Mary and her quietness at all. There's nothing nice or safe about it. Mary's silence here is a dangerous silence, it's a risky silence in which she starts to do that most dangerous thing of all- she starts to think, she starts to *dilogizomai*.

The angel is asking her to accept something that in her world is the very definition of disgrace. The angel is asking her whether she is willing to have a baby out of wedlock, taking the very real chance her fiancée will have nothing to do with her and even the possibility of being stoned dead in the streets. And Mary sits there and thinks all this through- and she begins to see that what seems like the worst thing in the world, the absolute most shameful thing possible, becoming pregnant without a husband- well maybe it's actually not the worst thing ever. Maybe she really could survive such a thing. And she begins to think that maybe there are worse things than saying yes to God and being a disgrace in the eyes of others- maybe it would be worse to say no and miss out on this adventure.

There's an old legend in the church about Mary that says Mary wasn't actually the first person the angel Gabriel spoke to about bearing the Christ child into the world. No, Gabriel went to others first. Right off the bat, Gabriel found the most devout, the most religious girl first. And he asked her whether she would do it. And she was nice. She smiled. She said she would pray for him. But no, she wouldn't do that, what would people think? So the angel kept searching. And he found the most beautiful girl- a fitting way for the son of God to come. And the angel asked her. And she was even nicer. She batted her eye lashes at him. And she gave him a big kiss on the cheek. But no, she wouldn't be able to help out either. And so Gabriel went to young woman after young woman, each turning him down. It was only in the end he came to Mary. And she wasn't the nicest girl. She wasn't the most faithful girl. And she certainly wasn't the prettiest girl in the world. But you know what? She was the only one gutsy enough to say 'Yes'. And this, this willingness to think for herself, this willingness to believe she could survive humiliation, this willingness to say 'Yes' - it turns out this is more important than anything else.

This image of Mary pondering, thinking- it calls us to quietness. It does. But it's not a safe quietness. It's a quiet in which we contemplate all of the ways in which we know we've failed and brought shame upon our selves- all of the things we feel keep us from the light of God's love. And in this silent space we encounter the good news that none of our failures are nearly as important or powerful than even the tiniest fraction of God's grace. And the question for us in Advent as we sit with Mary is whether like her,

we are willing to lay down our fears and say, “Hear I am, the servant of the Lord, let it be with me according to your word.”

Dana was right to be worried about Chad. Brent actually did OK. Made it through school. Got married and started a life. But Chad had a rough, rough passage through junior high and into high school, and got involved in trouble and pushed everyone away to the point our friendship wasn't able to endure it. I'm not sure whatever happened to Chad. But I like to believe, I like to hope, that his gift of being silent, of being thoughtful will lead him eventually to a good place- a healing place, a place where he knows and really believes that no matter what he matters, even if it takes him his whole life long to find it.

And I like to think that it was this same silence and willingness to think dangerous thoughts that made Mary not only attractive to that angel, but also why her son turned out to be the kind of person he did- brother to those with demons, friend to all willing to walk with him, whatever their past. You know the church gets all excited about Jesus' father, and for good reason. But, I wonder sometimes if this young man, so often going off to the hills to be quiet, if he didn't take more after his mother. **Amen.**