

It's really crazy, isn't it? Here we are listening to the same story, again. Who doesn't know how it is going to come out? The plot doesn't change from year to year. Every shepherd is in place; the star is shining on cue. No matter how predictable, we do keep listening. We lean forward with anticipation because we believe that this story is about us. What if the angel's message to Mary "the Lord is with you" is God's message to us?

Mary gives us a picture of faith that is a response to God's grace. Faith is an obedient response to God showing Himself in our lives. In Jesus Christ, we have experienced God as loving and giving; that is grace. Grace is God's love and care in action.

Trusting in God to deliver you from ultimate despair, discouragement and defeat does not come from the faith of your parents, or from a friend. They may prepare the way for faith but they cannot create faith in us. Faith comes as we discover that we have been favored, chosen, and blessed. We begin to trust in the one who loves, creates, and accepts us before the foundation of the world.

Mary's faith was not a mindless, blind leap. She has the nerve to question Gabriel because she did not fully understand what he had told her. In the same way, we should not be ashamed of our questions as we struggle with God being active in the world through each of us.

Can we be like Mary who asked questions but did not wait until every doubt was answered before she risked herself in believing the fantastic story?

The times I have shied away from trusting God for my future, or from believing that God's will was superior to my plans and schemes were not times of intellectual doubt, but fear. I was afraid that believing God might mean losing something, giving up my own comfort, or security or familiar lifestyle.

Faith is not dwelling on what we do not understand, but being faithful to the light we are given. Faith is not an act, it is a process. It is committing all we know of ourselves to all we know of God in Jesus Christ. Both will grow. As we know more of who we are, there will be more to invest in a God who has come to us, and said, "Fear not!"