

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. St Luke 1:26-27.

Elizabeth had been pregnant for six months when Gabriel was dispatched again from God's presence to bring news of another birth. He is sent to Nazareth, a rather out of the way place, and to the simple dwelling in which Mary is living. What's clear from the opening verses of the meeting of angel and girl is that she has plans: Mary is engaged and plans are advanced for her. The formalities of the betrothal have taken place, though Joseph has yet to complete the marriage by taking her to his home. Perhaps Mary had clear expectations of what life would look like with Joseph and it's difficult for us to understand the depth and cost of her calling.

However, we can understand something about plans and expectations that have to be set aside because of a dramatic change in our circumstances. We have all experienced something of that recently but on a deeper level our own plans can be turned upside down. A new job comes our way and new possibilities open up; a new relationship alters our lives; an illness sets us on a different course. We can sometimes find unexpected blessings in these times and that like Mary, we can go on trusting God. Looking back, it may be possible to think of times in our lives when our plans changed and see how God was with us in those times.

A prayer for use until Christmas Eve

Heavenly Father, who chose the Blessed Virgin Mary to be the mother of the promised Saviour: fill us your servants with your grace, that in all things we may embrace your holy will and with her rejoice in your salvation; through Jesus Christ our Lord.