

Advent Week 4 Reflection

Pr. Nicole Hanson-Lynn December 19-20

2 Samuel 7:1-11

Luke 1:46b-55

Romans 16:25-27

Luke 1:26-38

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and the giver and sustainer of our faith, the Holy Spirit.

It's such a familiar story, isn't it? Such a lovely, calming, peaceful story. The story of the angel visiting Mary, announcing her pregnancy and the coming messiah. It just gives all the warm fuzzy feelings.

But, as I've mentioned before, this scene would have been anything but warm and fuzzy for those humans experiencing it firsthand. There's a reason that the angel had to say, "Do not be afraid, Mary." Mary has become a model for obedience to God; her words in verse 38 are words we can all practice taking to heart. "Her am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." But for us to really appreciate the power of her words, we need to appreciate her context. It's easy to glorify the obedience without also speaking to the risk.

Mary was a young woman engaged, but not yet married. Premarital pregnancy had not only the risks associated with pregnancy in general, but also the societal risks. Social ostracism would have been one of the better responses; there were laws that would have allowed the community to stone her. Matthew's gospel describes Joseph's crisis with the situation, and his desperate attempt to find the sweet spot between mercy and law. Of course Mary would be afraid! Who wouldn't be? Her position in society is already vulnerable as a poor woman of an oppressed people, and now her premarital pregnancy gives her yet another layer of vulnerability. While we can say that Mary's pregnancy is a special case, most of the people around her did not get the benefit of an angel bearing the news. Her neighbors would have had only her word that she is not an adulteress. Luke doesn't even tell us about the angel visiting Joseph. Mary's response of trust is not merely a response to good and easy news, but a response of trust in the face of God saying things are going to be turned upside down. We don't get to hear inside Mary's head right away, but I cannot imagine that this was a part of her five-year plan.

But we also see in the gospel of Luke that Mary is not the only one God is preparing. Six months prior, God had planted compassion and joy in Elizabeth and Zechariah, and they were ready to receive Mary for the first three months of Mary's pregnancy.

Elizabeth and Mary share in their pregnancies, and Elizabeth recognizes Mary's situation even without Mary saying a word.

Right now, we are in the midst of our own struggle. Covid has shaken everything up, and it does not seem like God's answer has been what I wanted. As much as I was trying to prepare for a long haul, I really keep wishing that I could wake up and find out it's all been a dream. I want it to be according to *my* word, where we can return to normal routine and rhythms. But God works by creating new life. God creates anew within us, maybe not in quite the same way as Mary, but God does create within us in ways that are equally surprising. In ways that require our humbleness, our submission to *God's* will. We can follow Mary in trusting obedience to God, not out of fear that God will reject us if we do not, but out of trust in God that is so full that we trust what God says.

So in the midst of our chaos and turmoil, may we remember the chaos and turmoil of that first Noel. And may we remember that Mary's obedience was in the midst of surprise and change, new life brought to the world. Let us pray together, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word. Amen."

Announcements

Thank you to everyone continuing their financial support. Your stewardship and discipleship are faithful witnesses in this time.

We will have a Christmas Eve Family Devotional worship service. It is based on a Lessons and Carols service. So next week, you will receive the script for that service as well.

Enclosed, you will find the worship bulletin, readings, and reflections for our final Advent Midweek Worship services. Our theme is "Wandering in the Wilderness: Learning to Trust God."

Peace be with you.