

Questions of Advent:  
Is There Room in my Life for God?  
Isaiah 11:1-5, Luke 1:30-38

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December 6, 2020

Isaiah 11:1-5 (NIV)

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.

<sup>2</sup>The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—

the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD—

<sup>3</sup>and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.

He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; <sup>4</sup>but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.

He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. <sup>5</sup>Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.

Luke 1:26-38 New International Version (NIV)

<sup>26</sup>In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, <sup>27</sup>to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup>The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

<sup>29</sup>Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.

<sup>30</sup>But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God.

<sup>31</sup>You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. <sup>32</sup>He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, <sup>33</sup>and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

<sup>34</sup>"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

<sup>35</sup>The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.

<sup>36</sup>Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. <sup>37</sup>For no word from God will ever fail."

<sup>38</sup>“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her.

## PRAY

Birth announcements - and “gender reveal parties” - these days have taken on a life of their own. From cakes filled with pink or blue M&M’s, or fortune cookies filled with pink or blue confetti, the ideas get sillier and more dangerous from there. Sadly, several wildfires have resulted from chemicals loaded into a target filled with fireworks that explode, revealing the sex of the unborn child in pink or blue sparks. In at least two documented cases, fires started that burned thousands of acres and cost millions of dollars in losses.

Nothing that dramatic here. In fact, it is so low key as to be almost underwhelming! Gabriel shows up during Mary’s everyday chores. Surprise! “Don’t be afraid, you are God’s favorite!”

What?! Not the usual greeting, but Gabriel is not a usual visitor! Luke says Mary was “greatly troubled” and “wondered” (v. 29) about this greeting. Something is up! But the next words are perhaps more comforting: “*The Lord is with you.*” (v.28)

Gabriel goes on to explain: “God’s needing a mother for his Son - he’ll be a descendant of King David, the one promised long ago...His name will be Jesus. (Meaning “Savior” or “God Saves”). He will be the Son of the Most High and he will reign over an everlasting Kingdom.” Gabriel stops just short of asking Mary if she would apply for the job!

What do we know about Mary? She is betrothed. In ancient Jewish culture, this was a two-step process. First, was the formal engagement which involved a contract between the two families as well as payment of a bride price. Approximately twelve months later the contract was formalized in a wedding, after which the couple begin their life together.

Mary is “highly favored” (v.28, 30), having God’s blessing. This is pure grace, not earned or deserved, but a gift of God to Mary. But being the recipient of God’s favor also carries responsibility to live into the grace given.

Mary possessed some qualities which would make her a good mother: She is thoughtful (v.29), she is obedient (v.38), she is believing (v.45), she is worshipful (v.46) a faithful follower of the Law. As such, Mary would know the risks involved in agreeing to this plan: A premarital pregnancy runs the risk of rejection and disapproval of her family. She risks not just rejection but shunning of the larger community, knowing she would be an object of gossip and likely much worse. She certainly risks a broken engagement.

At the very least, she is looking at become an outcast, homeless. And at the most - if the letter of the law was followed - she risked being stoned to death for committing adultery. In short, Mary jeopardized everything that really matters - reputation, family, love and marriage, financial security and her own life - in order to serve God.\* Given that context, Gabriel's words, "fear not" take on a deeper meaning! Depending on her choice, she may have much to fear...

Mary put her life on the line - risking everything at a very young age, as she is likely still a teenager. But she is not ignorant. She understands human reproduction and questions Gabriel in this regard, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" (v. 34)

Mary was not seeking this or asking for this role. God sought her. In fact, there is an ancient Jewish legend (midrash) that says Gabriel approached several young, eligible Jewish women with this opportunity; all declined. Mary alone says "Yes" to God. Mary has room in her life for God.

Listen to this poem by Madeleine L'Engle, titled: "After Annunciation".

*This is the irrational season  
When love blooms bright and wild.  
Had Mary been filled with reason  
There'd have been no room for the child.*

(The poet's use of the expression "irrational" suggests that events such as angelic appearances move us beyond reason.)

The question Mary asks: "*How can this be?*" is not a question about the mechanics of human reproduction. Rather *it is a question about God's ability and human availability. It is a question of faith.*

Gabriel offers this explanation: “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.”

In other words: It is a God thing. Trust the Creator, to create anew in you, by the Holy Spirit, the One life that will give meaning to all the rest...It is a mystery...!

Perhaps to bolster his case, Gabriel tells Mary how God has answered the prayers of her cousin Elizabeth who is now six months along in an “impossible” pregnancy. Ultimately, Mary agrees, giving her consent to participate this plan of God’s, as presented by Gabriel.

Mary could easily have protested or offered excuses. Why me? This will ruin my reputation. It will break my engagement. I am too young; I am not ready to be parent. I do not have what it takes. Instead, she says: “I am the Lord’s servant. May your word to me be fulfilled.” (v.38)

But like bookends to this conversation there are two things that must have sustained Mary, not only through this pregnancy, but through the crucifixion to the resurrection and everything in between:  
“The Lord is with you.” (v.28) and “No word from God will ever fail.” (v. 37) The NRSV says: <sup>37</sup> For nothing will be impossible with God.”

Today God is looking for people with hearts of a servant, like Mary, to be willing participants in His plan to “give birth” to God’s coming Kingdom! The greatest ability that you and I can offer to God is our availability.

We may be blessed with many God-given skills, gifts, and talents, but if our calendars are so jammed, that we are not available, we are of no use to God. God cannot accomplish the possible - let alone, the impossible - if we are not available. God relies on our voices to offer words of encouragement and hope. God relies on our feet to take us to the places of greatest need, where God can then use our hands to help the hurting.

But are we free to serve? Are we free to participate in God’s plans?  
Is there room in your life/my life for God?

There is nothing to rule out a visit from Gabriel, but it is most likely in the course of day-to-day events that the Holy Spirit of God may ask us to participate in his plan.

We will know in part because it will push us beyond our comfort zone.

Yes, it may involve some discomfort or even a level of risk!

It may involve talking to someone we do not know.

Or talking to someone with whom we have a difficult relationship.

It may involve saying something when we would prefer to be silent, or to take action when we would prefer to remain uninvolved.

Whatever it is, when you feel the “nudge” of the Holy Spirit, the question is this: Is there room in your life for God?

Know this promise is not just for Mary, this promise for you and for me:

**“No word from God will ever fail.” (v. 37) The NRSV says: <sup>37</sup>For nothing will be impossible with God.”**

**Because, “The Lord is with you.” (v.28)**

\*idea from Wesley Tracy’s Advent meditation