

## Fourth Sunday in Advent: December 20, 2020

### The Sermon: Rev. Carol Ruthven

“For nothing will be impossible with God.” Luke 1:37

These are such powerful and comforting words spoken by the angel Gabriel to Mary. The words I imagine were incredibly comforting to Mary, just as they have been comforting to Christians throughout the ages. These are words that call for rejoicing. What can possibly bring us more joy than knowing that nothing will be impossible with God.

As we approach the end of the Advent Season and prepare to rejoice once again the birth of Jesus on Christmas Day, our attention is drawn to the wonder and awe of all that God can make possible. The word rejoice can mean two different things. It can refer to the joy and great delight that we experience when something makes us happy. It can also mean to give joy or to gladden the heart of someone. Jesus embodies the second meaning of the word rejoice. “He comes to be among us, born in a lowly stable, to give joy to us. To gladden our hearts. To be love incarnate, love made flesh.”<sup>i</sup> We receive Jesus’s gift of joy.

Jesus’ birth by immaculate conception of the young virgin Mary was something that only God could make possible. However, equally important was Mary’s willingness to obey God’s call to her. This young teenager was called to be the mother of Jesus, the long-awaited Messiah, who would bring healing, peace, joy, and salvation to the world. Although she was initially frightened and perplexed by this call, she had the courage to respond by saying, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord: let it be with me according to your word.” (Luke 1:38)

Mary’s faithfulness and courage follows the example of other faithful and courageous men and women, who responded to God’s call in their lives:

God used Miriam’s bravery as she kept an eye on her brother Moses, floating in a basket. She would go on to lead her people in praising God after they were brought out of Egypt. God raised up Deborah to free her people from the Canaanite king, Sisera. Esther discovered that she had been placed in King Xerxes’ palace in order to rescue her people from death. The prophetess Anna saw the infant Jesus in the Temple and praised God, speaking of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. An unnamed woman at a well in Samaria heard Jesus speaking and became an evangelist, bringing her village to faith. The wealthy businesswoman Lydia heard the Good News from Paul and became the first of her people to follow Jesus, using her means to support the new faith taking root in the Roman Empire.<sup>ii</sup>

“Mary’s response of ‘Here am I’ is part of a pattern woven into scripture. Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Samuel, and others heard God’s call and responded with those words.”<sup>iii</sup>

God’s call is not limited to Mary and other men and women in the history of the Christian church; it is a call to all of us, both lay and ordained. “God’s plan always involves using ordinary people to bring about extraordinary changes.”<sup>iv</sup> All Christians are called to use the gifts God has given them to work for the reconciliation of all the world.<sup>v</sup> In the Catechism, the teachings of our faith, the mission of the church is defined as

restoring all people to unity with God and each other in Christ. This is a ministry of reconciliation and the Church carries out its mission through the ministry of all its members, both lay and ordained.<sup>vi</sup>

“The ministry of lay persons is to represent Christ and his Church; to bear witness to him wherever they may be; and, according to the gifts given to them, to carry on Christ’s work of reconciliation in the world; and to take their place in the life, worship, and governance of the Church.”<sup>vii</sup>

Responding to God’s call in our lives is not always easy because we do not know in advance what to expect if we accept what God is calling us to be and do. Responding to God’s call requires us to let go of our own desires, expectations, plans, and egos. It is a letting go of own will and responding instead to God’s will in our lives. This requires faith and courage.

Mary was willing to trust that there would be joy in her life, if she was willing to let go of her fears and let God’s will prevail. “And her humble acceptance led to the birth of the savior of the world.”<sup>viii</sup> It led to her rejoicing and saying, “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” (Luke 1:46) This rejoicing captures both of the meanings of the word rejoice. Mary was able to experience personal great joy, as well as gladdening the hearts of generations of Christians throughout the ages who give thanks for her gift as serving as the mother of Mary. Every time we sing or say the words of Mary’s song, The Magnificat, in our Morning and Evening Prayer services, we rejoice with Mary and our hearts are gladdened.

Brothers and sisters let us follow Mary’s example of faithful obedience to God’s call in our lives and let us go into the world rejoicing as all that God can make possible in our lives and in the world. Amen.

---

<sup>i</sup> Richelle Thompson, [Waiting and Watching](#) (Forward Movement: Cincinnati, 2020), p. 101-102)

<sup>ii</sup> The Rt. Rev. Frank Logue, Bishop of Georgia, “Here I Am,” <https://episcopalchurch.org/library/sermon/here-am-i-advent-4-b-december-20-2020>

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>v</sup> Ibid.

<sup>vi</sup> , p. 855.

<sup>vii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>viii</sup> The Very Reverend Kate Moorehead, <https://day1.org/weekly-broadcast/5fcf95a26615fb6593000015/kate-moorehead-stepping-aside>