

“The Pregnant Yes”  
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St. Luke’s Episcopal Church – Anchorage, Kentucky  
IV Advent – 23 & 24 December 2017  
Luke 1:26-38

Advent is a pregnant season, and we’re at nine months today. It’s a time full of anticipation and excitement and wonder and joy. We wait eagerly for that special day when we concentrate all of our energy on celebrating the arrival of Jesus into the world. There’s also a tinge of anxiety, though, in the mad scramble to prepare. We wrap presents, plan for travel, or get our homes ready to receive guests. We whip up meals, and, of course, dozens of people have been working hard, mostly behind the scenes, to craft experiences of worship that bring us peace and open our hearts to the amazing love revealed in Jesus, God made flesh, come to be with us and for us.

In a way this mirrors a real pregnancy, with the whirlwind of baby showers and setting up the nursery and wrapping your head around the marvelous yet intimidating privilege that a new life is coming into the world, and you are responsible for it. And whether it’s an actual physical pregnancy or the more spiritual reality of Advent, countless details bounce around our minds.

There’s so much to do, so much to remember, and sometimes our worry distracts us from what matters most. It’s not that the Christmas traditions of gift-giving and gathering together and feasting are wrong, not in the least. To offer a gift or to extend hospitality or to travel so you can be with family, all of those things imitate the love of Jesus. He gifted himself to us and welcomed us and made a rather spectacular journey to be among us. It’s really a matter of balance, of perspective, so that Jesus stays in the foreground, the star of these sacred days, when the divine drama of new life, new birth, unfolds once more.

Yet it can be tough, in part because we do this every year, so there's not a lot of suspense. We know exactly when it will happen and how the story plays out. They say that familiarity breeds contempt, but in this season, our familiarity may breed complacency or even boredom. We need to guard against that, by sinking deep down into the story, to somehow hear it anew, and relive it by allowing the story to live in us.

Just imagine Mary, a young woman engaged to be married. No doubt she felt both excited and nervous, preparing for her wedding day, and she had plenty to do. This would change her life forever, but there was no way of knowing how, only dreams and hopes and perhaps a little fear for the future. At this busy time in Mary's life, God sent the angel Gabriel, who bore an astonishing message. Now being visited by an angel would rattle anybody's cage, inciting confusion and raising the question in a person's mind that perhaps they were coming unglued. And as John's gospel tells us, Mary "was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be."

Gabriel didn't leave Mary in suspense for long, and his message certainly put her worries about wedding details in proper perspective. You, Mary, will be impregnated by the Holy Spirit and give birth to the Son of God. Somehow, menus and flowers probably meant a lot less to her once she heard that. Gabriel went on. He will possess unimaginable power, fulfill God's ancient promises to his people, and irrevocably change the world. His name will be Jesus, and if Joseph wants a Joseph, Jr., instead, then too bad. That's a lot to take in, and I hope that Gabriel at least asked her to sit down and gave her a glass of water first.

This was radical and dangerous, two words that seriously understate the gravity of the situation. What would Joseph think when he found out that his supposedly virgin fiancée was pregnant? Would he believe what Mary told him about Gabriel's message, or make the obvious

assumption that she'd been unfaithful, break off the engagement, and make her an outcast? Even if Joseph did go ahead with the wedding, it's hard enough figuring out how to be a good mom, but there aren't any parenting books on how to raise the Son of God.

Initially, Mary responded with incomprehension, but in a surprisingly short span of time, she accepted the message Gabriel delivered and offered herself as a servant to God. Use my body as you will. That is a stunning act of faith, especially when you consider all the reasons why Mary could have said no, reasons we know all too well, because they often crop up when God sends us a message and calls us to serve, to take a risk to advance His purposes on Earth.

Mary could have protested that she simply wasn't good enough. I'm unworthy. Find a better person, Gabriel. I think God may have made a mistake, or maybe your angelic GPS has led you to the wrong house. Yes, that has to be it. Two streets over there's a woman much braver, stronger, and wiser, much more pious than me. That's who you're looking for. That's the woman you need for this mission.

Or Mary could have objected that the risk was just too great. This is a nice idea, and I'm terribly honored, but don't you realize how Joseph will react when he finds out? This won't work, because they'll probably stone me to death for adultery before the child's even born, and if they let me live, how could anyone believe that I've found favor with God and born a son to save the world? He'll never be accepted as legitimate, much less special.

Mary could have rejected the whole experience as unreal. Wow, my pre-wedding jitters are getting the best of me. I'm a simple country girl hallucinating delusions of grandeur. Or she could have used the excuse that she was just too busy. Now's not a good time, Gabriel. I appreciate the offer, and if you'd come back later, I'll give it my full consideration, but my life is quite complicated and hectic at the moment. This wedding's coming up. The invitations aren't

back from the engravers yet. We're still haggling over the guest list, so as you can see, I'm way behind schedule.

But she didn't resort to any of those reasons as a way to say no. Mary said yes, the second most important yes ever spoken. The most important yes, of course, is the yes that God says to us, despite our sin, despite our sometimes feeble faith, and the ease with which we get distracted. Mary's yes to God reverberates throughout all time and space, but her remarkable reply came from God's yes to her.

Yes, Mary, you are good enough to be chosen, because by grace I, God, make you more than good enough, no matter your perceived deficiencies or lack of qualifications. Yes, Mary, you can summon the courage to weather the storm ahead because I, God, give you power to overcome. Yes, Mary, this is possible – no matter how crazy, unnatural, and irrational it may seem – because “nothing will be impossible with God,” because my yes makes your yes possible.

Now take what I just said, and insert your name for Mary's, and ask yourself, could it really be true that I am good enough to say yes, because God has said yes to me first, said yes to me from before the beginning of time? Am I ready to say yes and receive the message and accept the call delivered to one and all, the message that the Holy Spirit will make me pregnant, a dwelling place for Jesus? Will you say yes to the risk and the scandal? Will you say yes to the labor pains that bring Christ into the world? And are you ready to choose, to say no to some things that seem so important, so that you can say the most important yes of your whole life, a yes to God that changes everything?

In a matter of hours, the pregnant season of Advent will draw to a close, and the birthing season of Christmas will commence. God will soon give us His son, the ultimate expression of

His loving yes. So when you get home after worship, take a piece of paper and write the word yes on it in big, bold letters. Put that in a box, and wrap it, and at some point in the coming days, in a moment of prayer and thanksgiving, open it, your gift to God, and set your yes free. Amen.