

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

East Moline, Illinois

Pastor Becky Sherwood

December 5, 2021, The 2nd Sunday of Advent

Micah 5:2-5a, Luke 1:26-38

Spending Advent with Luke's Gospel: Advent 2--The Angel Comes to Mary

Mary

We see her dressed in blue,
in our manger scenes, in Christmas pageants, on Christmas cards, in our imaginations.

She is quiet,
Somehow, more "meek and mild" than her son,
More meek and mild than most women we know.

More silent than most women we know. Less real than most women we know.

But what if we listen for her voice today,
her strong, brave voice, and her strong, brave life that was changed on an ordinary day, in an ordinary place?

What if we sift through the layers of time and look for this young girl who was chosen to carry the Son of God? What if we imagine ourselves in her place?

Mary lived in the tiny village of Nazareth. A place that wasn't significant in the history of her people; it wasn't even mentioned in the Old Testament.

Nazareth, a town that was later ridiculed by one of Jesus' disciples for being a backwater, unimportant place, from which nothing good could ever come.

Mary was a village girl, raised in Nazareth, raised in the Jewish faith of her people, her family, her village, her nation.

She was engaged to the carpenter Joseph; it was most likely an arranged marriage, planned by her parents years before it happened.

She is held in story and song as "Mother Mary, meek and mild." But I think there is a different side to her story that we hear in the passage we read from Luke.

In most of the stories of angels appearing to people in the Bible the very first words the angels speak are "Be not afraid."

It tells us that God's messengers are overwhelming to behold.

It tells us that the basic human reaction to angels in those first moments is fear.

Last week we heard the story of Gabriel coming to Elizabeth's husband Zechariah in the Temple. When he saw the angel, he was terrified and fear overwhelmed him and the first words the angel spoke to him were: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah."

But the story is told a bit differently when it comes to Mary. In the midst of an ordinary day, the Angel Gabriel comes to her and greets her with the words that she is chosen by God and God is with her. But before the angel says more, Luke tells us what Mary was thinking.

I like this glimpse into Mary's heart.

It tells us that she was remembered by Luke, and others who told her story,
for her faith, her pondering and thinking,
and the way she interacted with her God.

Luke writes: the Angel Gabriel said: "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." And Mary was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be."

Of course, Mary knew, even in that instant, that a visitation by an angel was going to change her life forever,

and of course, she was afraid,

and yet she was a thoughtful, thinking person of faith, who even in that moment thought about what this greeting might mean.

Mary was opening her heart to what was coming.

She pondered what it meant that God had sent this angel with a message for her.

And it was then in her pondering that Gabriel said: "Do not be afraid Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High."

Now we get another glimpse into the heart, thinking and strength of Mary, because she doesn't just take the angel's words at face value, she asks questions. Which seems awfully bold when talking to an angel by God. She says: "How can this be, how can I give birth to a son since I have never been with a man?" Mary is practical, she ponders, she asks questions, she has the strength to interact with this messenger from heaven and ask the most basic human questions.

Most people are frightened into silence.

Mary may be frightened, but she also asks questions;

she interacts with God's plan for her, told to her by God's messenger.

So the angel Gabriel explains to her the mystery that the child to be born will be the Son of God.

It is after listening, asking questions and pondering and thinking, after hearing the most fantastical story, that is somehow true, that Mary says "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

Mary says "let it be."

Mary says "yes."

She was already a young woman of faith,
who trusted that the God of the Universe had chosen her,
and she said yes and gave herself to God's plan for her life.

She said yes and gave birth to Jesus.

She said yes, and gave Jesus to the world.

On this second Sunday of Advent, I'd like to suggest that we move Mary out of our manger scenes and into our hearts as a teacher and guide in our own journeys of faith.

But I want to invite us to do even more than that.

I want to invite us to follow in her footsteps in the way that we say "yes" to God.

Back in the 14th century, the German theologian and mystic, Meister Eckhart wrote these amazing words that I shared with you last Advent:

"We are all meant to be mothers of God. What good is it to me if this eternal birth of the divine Son takes place unceasingly, but does not take place within myself? And, what good is it to me if Mary is

full of grace if I am not also full of grace? What good is it to me for the Creator to give birth to his Son if I do not also give birth to him in my time and my culture?"

"We are all meant to be mothers of God...for God is always needing to be born."

(Meister Eckhart, 1260-1328, German Dominican monk)

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/seasonsofthechurch/2014/12/we-are-all-meant-to-be-mothers-of-god/>

The mystery and the call of Christmas morning is that the God of the universe chose to come to earth to live among us. Long ago God chose Mary, a young girl from the backwater village of Nazareth, and she thought, and she pondered, and she said yes. Even though she was afraid, even though it changed her life forever, even though it asked everything of her, Mary said yes.

This morning God waits to be born into this time and this place, through us. Meister Eckhart's words call to us across the centuries: "We are all meant to be mothers of God...for God is always needing to be born."

The gift and the challenge of faith is that the God of the universe continues to choose us frail human beings as the ones to bring the Good News to the world:
that the Savior of the world has come to earth to love us
and to save us
and to show us God's heart.

May we walk in the footsteps our mother in the faith Mary, as God says to each one of us this morning:

I have found favor with you,
I your Lord am with you,
And now you who carry Jesus in your hearts,
live in a world that longs to hear and see God's love in the world.

May we now be the ones who think and ponder,
and take the risk of new birth and new life,
and say yes to our God,
and the path that each one of us is called to follow
to Christmas morning and beyond.

For "we are all meant to be mothers of God...for God is always needing to be born."