

Hello everyone! Thank you for joining us in worship for our first Wednesday Advent service. Thank you to our musicians, Einar, Robin, Craig, and Deb for sharing your gifts with us in the Holden Evening Prayer liturgy. And thank you to David, our video editor, for putting this service together.

As we hear the scripture readings and a meditation for this evening, I invite you to join me in taking a deep breath, in centering yourself. Advent is such a beautifully reflective time, and I invite you to join me in that space of reflection.

The Word of God we will hear tonight comes from the Gospel of Luke, the first chapter.

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "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, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

The Word of the Lord.

One thing I think our Catholic siblings get really right is their deep reverence and appreciation of Mary. Mary is such an incredible person, with a faith that is not only admirable, but powerful enough to change the entire course of the world, to carry and nourish and mother and bear God's son into the world. Not just any person could handle such a calling.

Mary is an incredible model for us of what faith can be. The angel Gabriel visited her to share with her what God's calling was for her - to bear God's son. And of course, like any person would be, she was confused and curious and definitely had some questions as to what was going on. Gabriel met her where she was, in her curiosity, answered her questions, and assured her of God and the Holy Spirit in the midst of this calling. And Mary consented, Mary agreed, Mary knew what was being asked of her, even in these nearly unbelievable circumstances, to be the mother of God's Son. She, by the power of her faith and hope in the Lord, agreed to nurture and bear Jesus Christ into the world.

Her mothering energy is, of course, something to be praised. But her faith, that commitment to follow where God called her and listening to God through the angel, is what changed the world for all time. Even though her calling was scary and she didn't understand everything, and there were lots of things in the world that may have convinced her to do otherwise, her faith was so strong. And with that faith came a radical hope, that even amidst these circumstances and the fear that comes from following a bold calling, God is still with her and there is a future in which she can rely and make the world better by mothering God.

This faith and hope of Mary is one of the greatest parts of Advent. We wait and anticipate the coming of Jesus Christ with a whole host of feelings and preparations and traditions, which is holy and beautiful. And the physical journey of Advent, the Word of God revealed to us for this season, is largely about Mary, about Joseph's journeying with Mary, about the angels proclaiming the coming of the Lord and the encouragement that with God all things are possible. Elizabeth's story of bearing a child in her unlikely circumstance also shares this radical hope and faith with us. We proclaim Jesus to be the giver of new life, and indeed, this is true even in the birth stories we celebrate in Advent, not only Jesus' resurrection from the grave.

What's amazing about faith and hope is what God does with and for us. So often in our lives we feel the need to rely on the experts, the seasoned and wise people who know so much more than we do, or have so many more experiences or education or insights than us. In our life of faith, I think this can be true too - we fall into the trap of not praying enough or not doing enough, or not trusting or hoping or even being enough.

But God doesn't choose the people who are experts, seasoned or exalt themselves as being more "enough" than the others. God, in fact through Jesus, often teaches against these experts in the temple, and proclaims that the mighty will be brought low and the low brought high.

God chooses the really unlikely people to work God's miracles in. God chooses the people who the world would cast aside or work against to bear witness to God's love and the power of the resurrection. God chooses women to bring life into the world and indeed proclaim the risen life of Jesus from the tomb. Jesus would not be here without the bold and life-changing, world-turning, curtain-tearing, earth-shifting faith of a teenaged woman named Mary. We resist the truth and word of people who seem unlikely for a whole variety of human-constructed reasons. But it is through the witness and faith of even these most unlikely people, who the world may cast aside, that we have the life-saving good news of Jesus Christ.

God chooses women to be the nurturers of God's Word. God chose Mary to be the life-giving bearer of God's Word.

God could have chosen Jesus, God's only Son, to enter into the world in pretty much any way. But God affirmed his choice of humanity, to bring Christ into the world through the messy and holy experience that we all are born through. God chose a human woman to bear God's Son. And her "yes" to God's calling gave us the gift of life, Jesus Christ himself.

As we continue to sing these words of the Holden Evening Prayer, and indeed as we continue to pray and worship and meditate on the coming of Christ throughout this Advent season, remember the bold and life-changing faith of Mary. Advent is truly a story about Mary's journey with Jesus, growing and mothering the Son of God, and I know mothers are no strangers to deep and holy anticipation. The life-giving faith of Mary, the blessed and perhaps unlikely servant of God, gives us strength when we feel the times or tasks ahead of us seem impossible. But nothing is impossible with God. Nothing will ever hold back the mothering and life-giving love that God made tangible in the birth of Jesus Christ. And the holy waiting of this season gives us a season to ask questions, to ponder, to wait, and eventually to celebrate the coming Son of God. I pray you will be nourished in your faith by the hope of this coming Christ. Thanks be to God, Amen.