

Year B Advent 4 2017  
2 Samuel 7:8-11,16  
Psalm: Luke 1:46b-55  
Romans 16:25-27  
Luke 1:26-38

Pastor Lindsey Jorgensen-Skakum  
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Holy Spirit Lutheran Church

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Grace and Peace to you all from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ – Amen.

The prophecy of the angel Gabriel rings out before us today:

*“Do not be afraid, Mary ... you will conceive a son ... and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and be called the Son of the Most High, and his kingdom will have no end.”*

What does this stunning word sound like to you today? A miraculous mystery? Praise worthy revelation? Good News?

Although I can't pinpoint exactly what it sounds like to me – I know I likely don't hear it as I should. While glad tiding of great joy resound throughout the world with the reading of this passage from Luke - I can't help but think what this message must have sounded like for Mary the first time it was heard. I know it likely didn't seem like the favor of the Lord. And I doubt it would initially have been called good news.

To be told you have been chosen to help bring God's son to earth sounds like a daunting task for anyone to take on – with God's favor or not. And even if this is Jesus we are talking about - giving birth as an unwed teenager was likely the last thing on young Mary's to-do list that year. After all, getting unexpectedly pregnant has never been a popular thing for a single woman to declare, and as a society we have come to punish those that do so over the years.

And in Mary's day it was no different. In the very least, she would have been marked with the shame and condemnation of her community of faith – and at worst, under the Levitical law she would have been labeled unfit for marriage and stoned to death by her neighbors.

And as much as I would like to say things are different today - sadly they often are not that far off the odds Mary faced. While not many teenage mothers will find themselves stoned to death, they may find themselves ostracized by their partners, family, friends, and their communities of faith. As if such actions were the faithful response one was supposed to take when the vulnerable within our community share the truth of their experience. We can be so quick to judge rather than simply extend God's love and grace.

Which leaves me to question why God chose to enter our world in this way? After all, the Lord could have chosen to take on flesh in many ways. Wouldn't he have been better off

at that time as the son of a king, with wealth, security, and access to the royal throne rather than being born to a bunch of poor teenagers in a stable?

And while we are on that topic - why choose to be born in the first century at all? With death, disease, and famine around every corner, never mind a ruler who is set on killing you before you are even born – it doesn't sound like the best time to come to save the world at all. In fact, it's shocking to think Jesus even survived to reach adulthood and begin his ministry around Galilee.

With odds like that stacked against Christ, wouldn't it simply have made more sense for him to come down from the clouds as a thirty-year-old teacher today. I mean if Jesus can walk on water, I'm sure he could have bounced on down on a relatively clear day with plenty of photographic proof that he was the son of God anyway. With social media at its height, and the conveniences of modern travel, I can't think of a better time period than now to share the Good News of God with the world. Even with all the charges of fake news some president to the south of us would likely tweet out.

Yet, in the midst of all these possibilities, across every time and space, God chose that time over two thousand years ago, in Bethlehem, to be born to Mary, an unwed teenage mother in a lowly stable – setting the stage for God's coming reign within our world. And that is the unlikely Good News this angelic word prepares us to hear today.

Because throughout history God chooses unlikely people, in unlikely places, and in unlikely times to share the message of God's love and grace. A message sent through - Emmanuel – God with us – that this incredibly fragile situation and family would turn out okay. So what does that mean for us today? Why is that good news for us to hear? Because if God chooses to be with the last and the least – God certainly also comes to be with us here – calling to each of us waiting and watching for the Savior to appear.

This is part of the message we have come to explore this Advent – that this season of waiting before Christmas isn't about getting our shopping lists right, or even proving to your family that you can cook the turkey in time. It's a conspiracy set in motion thousands of years ago by a tiny child laid in a manger. That God moves the entire center of the universe, hinging the message of our salvation not with the rich and the powerful but with the poor and the oppressed.

A message that if we take it seriously may just change the way we come to view our very world. God decided to write the Good News into the very margins of our society and world. And God decided that the hope of all creation would come to rest on the answer

of a young teen age girl. And her response was powerful— Yes! *“Here I am, the servant of the Lord - let it be with me according to your word.”*

I know for me my answer to God’s call sometimes isn’t so sure. I hesitate. I question. I wonder if what I am hearing is right. Which is why I marvel at Mary’s willingness to listen to hear what the Lord was calling her to before giving her yes against all the odds were stacked against her. A response that acts as a compass for us as we struggle to live out the truth of this gospel within our own life today.

It’s a question we face when we are confronted with God’s call to stand with the most vulnerable and forgotten people in our community. Are we willing to say yes when common sense and the world say no?

What about when they say you’re a fool, you have given too much, they don’t deserve it anyway, they will never get a job, it’s a waste of your time, they will never get sober, they are too hard to love, what good will it ever do you anyway?

Will we continue to echo Mary’s yes again, and again, and again?

Holy Spirit you have taken on a prophetic message of welcome that has come to change the very fabric and ministry of this community of faith. A message that has shaken the foundations of this church but flung wide its doors for all. A community that has been willing to say yes – even when the wider church and society has decided to say no.

A family of God that has chosen to walk with those who are here for their first Sunday or those who can trace their family name back to the charter roll.

A community of faith that has done the right thing again and again as we embrace members of the LGBTQ community offering them a welcoming church home.

A church where we continue to gather to learn how to live in right relationship with first nations neighbors, with people of other faiths, with those who struggle with inadequate housing, those living with addiction, or refugees who are new to this city.

A holy place where we hold space for the most vulnerable among us to feel God’s embrace – for our children, youth, and differently abled members to feel they are valued and contributing members in this community of faith.

And as we do – we say yes each and every time to God who has promised to be with us in the midst of such a community.

Today through Mary's word's God asks us if we too will continue to answer the gospels call? Will we continue to welcome those who are different than us? Will we care for the vulnerable and uplift the oppressed? Will we continue to be good stewards of all of creation? Will we be freed to share God's love with all?

This morning it is my prayer that we will continue to say yes. That we will have the same courage and hope of a poor unwed teenage mother to answer God's call. Because that is the kind of hope that can change the entire world. It's the only kind that ever has. So as we prepare to welcome Christ as a tiny child once more – let us remember Mary's yes and give our own once more.

And may this be so among us – Amen.