

Be Open to God's Plan
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Luke 1:26-38

26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth,
27 to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's
name was Mary. 28 And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with
you." 29 But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this
might be. 30 The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.
31 And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.
32 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. 33 He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of
his kingdom there will be no end." 34 Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a
virgin?" 35 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. 36 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. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God."
38 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.

Our gospel lesson describes the how Mary receives news of what is often referred to as "the immaculate conception." The word "immaculate" here means "without sin." The church has included this adjective to say that -- because Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit -- he was not tainted by the original sin that is passed down from generation to generation from our first parents Adam and Eve. By speaking of Jesus' coming into the world as immaculate, the emphasis is on perfection. Jesus is born perfect, the result of God's perfect Spirit united with Mary's perfect obedience.

It seems to me that a better i-word would be "impossible." That is the word we often associate with miracles. We think of miracles as God-actions that seem impossible to us, or that make the impossible possible. When the tumor stops growing, starts shrinking, and then disappears -- we call that it a miracle. When a job offer comes during widespread unemployment, it feels like nothing short of a miracle. But the older I get, the more I'm convinced that we use *miracle* too sparingly. If a miracle is anything I that I do or anything that I experience that would be impossible apart from God's action, then any act of love or compassion or forgiveness or kindness I can do falls under the category of miracles. The Apostle Paul says: I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Phil 4:13). I say: Apart from God's transformative power in my life, I can't do much at all.

God's work of bringing something new in our lives always feels impossible. That's why it is always miraculous.

Examples in my own life:

Practicing centering prayer

Removing distractions (ie addictions) like social media

Being still instead of trying to "fix the problem" in relationships

- *What new way of living for God feels impossible for you?*

God's messenger Gabriel had news for Mary that she was being invited to live for God and be a blessing to the world in a way that we all agree is totally miraculous. She was to have a baby. She was to bear a son – not just any son by THE longed-for Son of God – the one the world longed for. But Christmas isn't just about Christ born once in Mary. It's about each of us allowing Christ to be born in us, allowing a new expression of God's love to enter the world through us.

There is a process – indeed, a pattern – to this miracle that is just as true for us as it was for Mary. It begins with pregnancy by the Holy Spirit, then gestation, then the struggle of giving birth. God's new thing always starts small in us. It always takes time to grow. There comes a time when the new thing is to be shared with the rest of the world. This sharing never comes without great pain and effort. This is a time for celebration, but that's not the end! Just as Mary not only gave birth to Jesus but also nurtured him and raised him into adulthood and ultimately let him go, so too does God call us to bring a new thing .

God doesn't do miracles in our lives just to bless us. It isn't just for our joy.

What God births *in you*, God intends *for the world*.

- *What new way being a blessing to others might God being birthing in you?*

For that new thing to happen, God does the acting. If God is the one who initiates, then what do we do?

God does the *acting*, but we do the *allowing*. Mary gives us a beautiful example of what *allowing* looks like.

She is perplexed. That is, she embraces the mystery of what is being offered.

She ponders. She takes this message deep into herself, contemplating it, doing heart work around it, not just head work.

She asks: How can this be? In other words, she stays open to God's plan even though it doesn't fit inside any of her categories.

And at last she says, “Here am I... Let it be...” She makes herself totally available to what God wants to do. This is the work of surrender.

Allowing means we say “yes” not only to what God wants to do. *We also have to say yes to the way God wants to do it.*

That means that **Allowing is not passive, and it is not easy or effortless.**

I think it’s pretty easy to say Yes to God when we think saying yes means blessing without burden, salvation without struggle, comfort-and-joy without labor-and-delivery. It’s also easy to say Yes to God when we keep things on a personal, individualistic level. But as I suggested earlier, **What God births in you, God intends for the world.** Mary’s experience of bringing the Christ child into the world was messy. There was nothing convenient or easy or romantic about it. The world she brought him into was a mess! It was fraught with social upheaval, injustice, and violence. It will be that way for us, too. But this is part of the Gospel as well, isn’t it? God shows up in the mess. We see God best when circumstances are at their worst.

- *What if God wants to use the mess of 2020 to bring about something new in your life, for the sake of the world? Can you, like Mary, say ““Here am I... Let it be...”?*

Be open to it. Trust in God to act. Ask for the grace to allow.

Amen.

<Now let us light the Advent Candles>