

Luke 1:26-38
2 Sam. 7:1-11,16
Psalm – Luke 1:46b-55

Sermon from 12/20/2020 – Trinity Lutheran Church, Herkimer
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Saying Yes to God

“Greetings favored one! The Lord is with you.” Imagine if someone you knew came up and said this to you. You’d undoubtedly think they wanted something, something big. Imagine if a total stranger came up to you and said these words. I’m guessing you’d most certainly be afraid. You’d think they were a little crazy. Now imagine if it was a divine messenger. That was the case for Mary in today’s gospel account. And right away the angel said not to be afraid, because well, seeing an angel – a divine messenger – usually brings about fear. In fact, when anyone, let alone an angel, says, “don’t be afraid” it often signals that something they are about to reveal will *cause* us to be afraid. It means something pretty earth-shattering is about to happen.

And of course, the news that the angel told Mary was earth shattering. Yet, the strange thing is that Mary wasn’t shocked at seeing the angel. Did that mean she was accustomed to seeing them or did faith lead her to believe that this was certainly possible? What is interesting is that Mary was perplexed and taken aback not by the appearance of the angel, but by the angel’s words. It was this greeting that had Mary puzzled and perplexed. Favored one? She most likely looked around to see if this angel was talking to someone else. Me? I’m justMary. God favors me?

She was just Mary, a young teenage Palestinian girl between 13 and 15 years of age. She was Mary, an unwed teenage girl at that. And this divine messenger was telling her that she was chosen by God to be the instrument through which God will bring forth the savior of the world? Mary wasn't the most important person in the village. She wasn't even the most educated person. She felt she was just ordinary. Yet somehow, the message was that God felt she was the right person for this holy vocation – the mother of the messiah. What an honor, yet Mary never signed up for this. Like most of the prophets in the Scriptures, Mary had questions and so would we. “Wait a minute,” she said to the angel, “how can this be?” It's a reasonable question and I'm sure we don't have the whole story. I'm sure Luke didn't write down everything that Mary was thinking or feeling. It must have been overwhelming and not in a positive way.

To say yes to what God was asking of her would have been to subject herself to ridicule and scandal. A young girl engaged to be married and already pregnant? Even in today's society that causes quite a stir. Imagine what that would mean back in the ancient middle east 2000 years ago or even in that culture today? She could be stoned to death! Accepting this task could very likely mean that Mary might die. That's a lot to ask of a young girl. That's a lot to ask of anyone. And God was asking her to say yes, to allowing the Son of God to be born in her. She was being asked to be the temple, the home for God to dwell.

This was not the first time that God said God would dwell in a different kind of temple. God's message to Nathan and David in our first lesson from 2 Kings told how King David wanted to build God a house, a tabernacle, where God could dwell or abide continuously without having to be moved around all the time. But God said, “I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle.” God then said, “I will make you a house.” And God was faithful to that

promise. And now, through the power of God's Holy Spirit, Mary would conceive a son, Jesus, who would be the fulfillment of that promise made centuries ago. Jesus would be the promised Messiah, the Anointed One, the Savior of the world.

You see, God doesn't require houses of brick and mortar to be with us today any more than God did centuries ago when David wanted to build a stationary temple. God makes a home within each one of us. During this time of pandemic when we cannot gather physically together to worship in a common building, we can cling to this promise that God is a God who is always on the move, and makes a home with us wherever we are. Like Mary, we may ask, God favors me? God thinks enough of me to make a dwelling place in me? God thinks enough of me to entrust to me dreams that seem impossible? The answer to us is the same as it was to Mary. Yes. You are favored by God.

God knows we are not perfect, and God wants to make a home in our imperfect bodies. God has a vocation – a special purpose – for each and every one of us. Some of us are called to be parents, teachers, factory workers, farmers, office workers, and dozens of other kinds of jobs. God uses our vocations as a means to proclaim God's glory. God equips us with the skills needed to do what we are called to do. God has called us to be disciples of Christ and to follow in His footsteps, to continue the ministry Jesus began, and to bring about the kingdom of God here on earth. Like Mary, when she received that divine news, we may ask, "How can this be?" We don't understand. We don't have all the facts. We don't have all the answers. Sometimes the things God asks of us are difficult, and seem impossible. Love our neighbors? Love the people who may not love us back? Forgive those who hurt us? Put God before everything and everyone else in our lives? Yes, that is what God asks of us.

Saying yes to God can be hard. Jonah tried to run away from what God wanted him to do, but eventually Jonah couldn't escape. Moses tried to say send someone else because he didn't feel he could speak well enough. David was just a boy when God called him to be a king. And Mary was just a young girl when God said you are the one I want. Yet God doesn't force anyone. God too waits.

God waits for us to say yes, like Mary did. She didn't understand how this dream of God was all going to happen, but she trusted in God's word. It's hard to trust God when you don't know how something is going to work out, but God can be trusted. God is faithful to the promises God makes. That word and promise was repeated again by her cousin Elizabeth when she went to visit her. Elizabeth said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb." Elizabeth herself was a divine messenger to Mary. And Mary then uttered those most beautiful of words known as the Magnificat. "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." Her yes to God implanted not only God's Son in her womb, but God's Spirit of courage and hope in her being. That seed of faith grew to cause her to proclaim God's own words of justice and salvation for all people.

God waits for our words of proclamation as well. Through our baptism, God has built a temple, a dwelling place within us so that God could continually be on the move in us. In the messiness and cruelties of life, God makes a dwelling place with us. In the heaviness and darkness of life, God makes a dwelling place with us. In the disappointments and griefs of life, God makes a dwelling place with us. In the suffering and isolation from this pandemic, God makes a dwelling place with us. And in the midst of death itself, God makes a dwelling place with us, and promises new birth.

And God does all of this because God loves us. God believes in us. God first said yes to us, in becoming one of us. God says, “Greetings favored one! The Lord is with you.” God is indeed with us. On this fourth Sunday of Advent as we draw ever closer to celebrating the birth of Emmanuel – God with us -let us trust in the promises of God who is giving birth to seemingly impossible hopes and dreams every day. Believe in those dreams and visions that God has placed within you individually and collectively, because nothing is impossible with God. Amen.