

## **Mary and the Way of the Kingdom**

### **Reading: Luke 1:26-38**

Good morning.

As our reading alerts us, today we come again to participate in... to get caught up in the **season** of Advent... the **journey** of Advent... the **heartbeat** of Advent. A season in the life of the historic Christian community that invites us to join our voices with God's people down through the ages in singing and praying:

**O Come, O Come**, Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel,  
That mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear.

*O Come, Thou Dayspring, come and cheer  
our spirit's by Thine advent here.  
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night  
and death's dark shadows put to flight.*

*O Come Thou Wisdom...*

*O Come Desire of nations, bind  
All people's in one heart and mind  
Bid envy, strife and quarrels cease  
Fill all the world with heaven's peace...*

Those words – that prayer – embodies the heart cry and hope of Advent – our **deep need** and **hope** and **longing** for the coming of God's kingdom into our lives and world – **over all** and **in all**...

Advent – as it calls our attention **back** to God's coming into our world in the birth of Jesus and **forward** to the final return of Jesus – stirs us to pray as Jesus taught us to pray – "May Your Kingdom come and Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven..."

Which is not just a Christian prayer and longing. It is the longing of every human heart... As the Advent carol says, "O Come, **Desire of Nations...**"

This isn't just a Christian prayer and longing. It is the longing of every human heart... We may not **all** articulate it **as that** – as a longing for **God's** kingdom and will - but all of our hearts, and at times our lips, **do** cry out for and reveal a deep longing for life in God's kingdom – *for the peace and shalom that is found only in God's kingdom, for healing and restoration (of our bodies, and emotions, our relationships and families and communities), for justice and mercy, for forgiveness and reconciliation, for love, fruitfulness and grace... for joy!*

Whether or not we'd articulate this as a hunger for **God's** will to be done in our lives, for God's Kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven, **that is exactly what it is**. Our hearts and lives, and at times our lips, **all** cry out for that for which God created us – life in the Kingdom of God – life in and under the good and beautiful reign of God.

**And Mary**, whom we are introduced to in Luke 1, **knew this longing deeply**.

**We hear it in her prayer – her song** (in the text that follows this morning's text – in **Luke 1:46f**) – her prayer in celebration of the

incredible news that Jesus – which means "God saves" – would be born to her...

Her response reveals/**erupts with** the hope of God's Kingdom...

- for God to act in power to save ("to perform mighty deeds with his arm")
- for God to scatter those who are proud in their inmost thoughts
- for God to bring down the rulers from their thrones
- for God to lift up the humble
- for God to fill the hungry with good things, and send the rich away empty
- for God to help his people in mercy and fulfill his promise to their ancestors...

Mary's heart **beat with** the **hope of** and **cry for** the Kingdom.

Which should not surprise us, simply because Mary was a Jew. A devout Jew growing up in Israel **under Roman occupation**.

Which, as Glen mentioned last Sunday, would have been **an overwhelmingly hard reality**.

And not just because the Romans were harsh and oppressive occupiers, but because the Jews were a people who's **self-identity**, more than anything else, was shaped the Story of God's revelation and action in history, **and His promise** – His promise of a Day when, as He did in the Exodus, He would break into human history and **deliver** His people from their oppressors, to bring them back from their exile, and to establish His Kingdom over them... and over all... **And bless them... for good... forever...**

**This** promise, **this** hope, this **ache**, as revealed in her song,  
lived **deep** within Mary, as it would have lived deep within every Jew  
in her day...

*As it does among many in our day...*

***As it does in us...***

But, as we'll discover in Mary's story, the coming of the Kingdom  
that we long for, doesn't always come in the **Way** we might want it.

Yes, we may long for God's kingdom to come on earth as it is in  
heaven, in our lives and the lives of others around us, *but what if it  
comes in a way that will **cost us**?*

What if it involves a **cross** – **for us**?

Amidst other things, the story of Mary and the Annunciation  
confronts us with this question... -----

So, if you have a Bible with you, turn with me to **Luke 1:26f**,  
and as we turn there, **let's pray...**

**Well, as you might have noticed,** I've chosen a somewhat  
unfamiliar painting of what's often referred to as "**the Annunciation**"  
- the moment when the angel announces to Mary that she will give  
birth to Jesus.

As some of you might recognize, this is actually a painting by my  
wife, which she painted almost 20 years ago now... Janet's style and

skill has progressed greatly in the last 2 decades, but I still love this piece.

I've chosen this piece, not as a shameless plug for my wife's art, but because this portrayal isn't your typical "precious moments" scene. It doesn't bear the usual "Thomas Kinkade" glow of serenity and bliss.

No, Mary is portrayed here in a state of **shock and fear** - as she takes in all that the angel says to her **and what it will mean for her**. I believe Janet was trying to capture the moment *between* the angel's announcement and Mary's response of trusting submission. And if you find this portrayal of Mary unfamiliar, then you, like the rest of us, need to hear again the very real story of the Annunciation.

Here, in **Luke 1:26**, we are introduced to this young woman named Mary. Truth is, she is a young **girl, a young devote Jewish girl**. The text says that she is a "virgin" or a "maiden", which *does* refer to her virginity, but also to her age. She's probably 13 or 14 years old. *(This could be my daughter or one of her friends!)*

As in other cultures that move quickly from childhood to adulthood, Mary is betrothed to a man named Joseph. He might have been a few years older, maybe a fair amount older, who knows - whatever the case, he seems to have been a good catch, as we are told in Matthew that he is **a righteous man** - which was and is still **a desirable quality**. Betrothal is the first stage of marriage in the

Jewish tradition (more legally binding than engagement), and it usually lasted for a year before the wedding day.

There is nothing particularly unique told about Mary and Joseph, or their lives before this. We know from the story that she was devoted to God and humble, but not in any extreme way. We aren't told that she lived in the temple, or spent an exorbitant amount of time every day in prayer and studying Torah.

***She's just an ordinary 13-14 year old Jewish girl, living an ordinary Jewish life, seeking to faithfully honor God in the midst of daily life, longing for the kingdom, and dreaming of her wedding day.***

Her and Joseph live in a small town, Nazareth, in the region of Galilee. As far as we know, life was normal - just two people seeking to get to know each other, to plan for the future, to follow the will of God for their lives, and to not lose their virginity before their wedding night. Right? *This is just two regular people dealing with the challenges of normal life.*

***And into this: God enters.***

Actually an angel, Gabriel, sent on God's behalf.

Interestingly, through the entire Bible, there are only two angels ever referred to by name, Michael and Gabriel - both who are said to stand in the very presence of God.

Again, as Glen reference last Sunday, forget about cute little cherubs with a suction cup bow and arrow set, these angelic creatures *must* have had a *commanding* and *startling* presence - for there isn't a story in scripture where their appearance doesn't send holy fear into the hearts of all present. There is a reason why the first words of an angel are **always**, "*do not be afraid*".

Not because angels are terrifying creatures, but because coming face to face with pure holiness has a way of cutting us to the core.

Anyways... when God felt the time was right, He sent this archangel, Gabriel, to visit this 14 year old girl named **Mary**.

Who knows what she was occupied with at the time, but as she went about her day, **the angel Gabriel** appeared to her and said, "*Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.*" (I'm not good at angel impersonations, so I'll leave that to your imagination!)

In reading this, we tend to think, "Oh, wow, wouldn't that be amazing to have an angel show up in my living room and speak to me!" But remember, this isn't Casper the friendly ghost, this is an archangel who is usually standing in the presence of the Almighty God.

Not surprisingly, **Mary was freaked out.** The text doesn't specifically use the words "freaked out" - but I think it captures the sentiment. We're told Mary was **greatly troubled**, disturbed, confused. Not so much by his appearance, but by his greeting. *By the*

meaning of his words. **"Why me? Where's this going?"** The fear and confusion may have been evident in her eyes (as the painting depicts), for the angel's next words are, as always, *"Do not be afraid, Mary."*

And the angel goes on to explain the meaning of his appearance and this greeting...

**Imagine yourself** as a young Jewish girl, 14 years old, a virgin and betrothed to a respectable Jewish man (I know that is quite a jump for some of us, but work with me)... 14, a virgin, Jewish, betrothed... Gabriel says, *"You have found favor with God – been chosen by God, graced by God. You will conceive and give birth to a child - a son, and you are to call him Jesus [which means "savior"].* *He will be great and will called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over God's people forever; his kingdom will never end..."*

At this point, **I'm** picturing Mary stunned to silence – with a blank stare – hiding behind it a world of confusion, questions, shock. (maybe something like what is depicted in this painting).

In the midst of this, Mary somehow realized that this was something that was to happen soon, *very soon*... before her and Joseph would have an **appropriate** opportunity to work on this...

And so she asks the angel, *"How will this be, since I'm a virgin?"*



Her words don't seem to reflect a lack of faith that this *could* take place, just a basic confusion about how it *would* take place... In contrast to Zechariah's response, she isn't saying, "yeah right?!", rather she's saying, "how?"

And the angel answers her. (Again, imagine yourself as a young 14 year old Jewish girl, a virgin, and betrothed to a respectable Jewish man)... He says, "*The Holy Spirit will conceive in you this child - the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God... Even your cousin Elizabeth is going to give birth to a child in her old age - she who has been barren and is well beyond child-bearing years, is in her second trimester. God is able to do everything that He says He will do.*"

Again, **I'm** picturing Mary with this blank stare - taking in all that the angel has been saying to her - realizing all that it means. She's probably thinking to herself, "What am I gonna say to my *parents? How* will I explain this to *Joseph, and his mother, and the neighbors and others at the synagogue?*"

We tend to read this as a precious moments scene: "*Oh, how blessed Mary was to be the mother of Jesus - I wonder what the birth felt like? Must have been amazing*". And yeah, of course, it would have been a great honor to be visited by an angel (especially one so

famous), and to be told that she would conceive a child by the work of the Holy Spirit and give birth to the Saviour of the world...

**But in the midst of this**, we also have to realize that we have here a young Jewish girl who is betrothed to a respectable Jewish man, not yet married, and now she's being told that as of this moment or in a moment, she is pregnant... and the only explanation she has is that **God did it.**

**Yeah. Right. Sure Mary. God did it. (SCANDAL?)**

Amidst the incredible honor and grace of this news – *the good news/the gospel of God's long awaiting coming* – this must have been a profoundly hard moment for Mary. For in this amazing moment of hearing that the favor of God, the blessing of God was with her, and that she would be given the grace of being the mother of the Saviour of the world, **Mary came face to face with her cross**. She came face to face with the reality that receiving the life of God, that the coming of the Kingdom, that becoming a vessel of the life of God, would cost her her own life (not in the sense of physical death, but in the sense of **everything else**).

In this glorious moment of the announcement of God's intention to form within her the means of her salvation, to form within her the means of the salvation and redemption of the world, Mary came face to face with the realization that **the way** of God's will, the **means** of

God's will being done in and through her **would not be easy. Far from it!**

It would cost her **so much**. It would mean suffering – physical, emotional, relational. It would mean being misunderstood. It might mean losing Joseph and being marginalized by her community. It might cost her her reputation (and that of her family and Joseph's). It would demand her body and her youth, her future and what she had always expected for the years ahead...

**And yet in the face of all this, somehow Mary knew that through her sacrifice of faith, through her costly obedience, through what she would give up, God would use her life to bring His kingdom into the world – to save the world... and herself...**

And so Mary said "yes" to God. She said to God, before the angel, "**I am the Lord's servant.** *May it be done to me as You have said... May your word to me be fulfilled...*"

Here I am Lord, whatever the cost, have Your way in me, with me - for Your glory and will...

Knowing that this gift and grace would cost her greatly, she bowed in surrender and trust and offered herself to God – offering her body, her relationship with Joseph, her reputation, her youth, her future... everything... trusting that whatever it would cost her, **it**

**would be worth it.** That it was worth giving up her own life that she might receive the life of God growing within her... and become the vessel of God's life and salvation to others.

*"I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled."*

That's Mary's story. Not exactly the one we've always been told or remembered.

Down through the ages, Christians have recognized in this story God speaking. **Like Mary**, God intends to bring forth the life of Christ within each of us, and to make us into the vessel of His life to others...

And he is able. So *able*. He has done it countless times before – bringing forth His life in and through the lives of His people...

But, like Mary, the Kingdom – the Incarnation – comes at a cost... And so, like Mary, the question comes: *Will we offer up our lives, lay down our lives, give up our lives, our reputations, our plans, so that God might do in and through us what only He can do? Will we embrace the cross – that God's kingdom might come in & through us?*

If we're honest, I suspect there are a lot of moments, seasons and situations where, as our lips cry out for God's Kingdom and reign and glory and will, our hearts also are saying, "And here's how I'm picturing it... *Here's how I want you to do it...*"

"God, may your Kingdom come and your will be done, **but this way, ok? Not that way!**... Do it another way, an easier way, a way that is more fun and adventurous or peaceful, something that feels like the wind in our sails."

But as Mary's story informs or reminds us, the coming of the kingdom always involves a cross. **And not just for Jesus.**

Jesus isn't the only who had to endure a cross. We all do. As Jesus tells us in **Matthew 16:24**, "*Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.*"

Which is often what leads many to walk away, or just look away and distract ourselves. But in doing so, we reveal how much we don't understand *what Mary understood* – **that this is how God would save the world!** That her sacrifice – her self-denial – her obedient trust would ultimately mean **life** for the world – **including herself.**

Too often we talk about the call to take up our cross as though it is an end in itself – **but it's not.** Jesus invites and calls us to deny ourselves and take up our cross that through this, we might and others might come to receive and experience the rescuing grace of God... **God's life – in us...**

That's what enabled Mary to respond as she did...

And even more than that, this is what enabled **Jesus** to go to the cross... and to embrace suffering **throughout** his life...

Why? Because, as the writer to the Hebrews tells us

**(Heb 12:2), "For the joy set before him, he endured the cross."**

For the joy set before Him...

Jesus knew that the cross before Him was necessary – a necessary **path**, but **only a path**, that would **lead to** the ultimate **goal**, the ultimate **joy**, of seeing multitudes of women and men (like you and me), and all of creation, restored, redeemed and reconciled **by God - to God**.

*'For the joy set before Him, Jesus endured the cross...'*

And the same can be said of Mary... *that for the joy set before her, Mary endured her cross.*

**"I am the Lord's servant.**  
*May your word to me be fulfilled."*

*That Your kingdom may come... That Your will would be done – on earth as it is in heaven.*

So, what about you? What about me?

As we cry out in Advent, "**O Come, O Come, Emmanuel**", where is the Spirit inviting us to join our voice with Mary, bowing in trust, offering our lives, and saying, *"I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled."*

*Here I am Lord. I am Yours. Have Your way in me – for your glory, for the good of the world, and for my joy in you.*

**Let's take a moment of *silence to speak back to God* whatever our heart needs to say... as we prepare to come together to receive the Lord's Supper...**

(invite the worship team and communion servers)

invitation to the Lord's Supper -----

This morning, in response to our reflection on Mary's story, we are going to come together to **Christ** – to share in the Lord's Supper – to take the bread and the cup – this tangible signs of God's gracious sacrifice **for us...** and God's call **to us...**