

WHAT IS GOD PLANNING? WHO IS GOD CHOOSING?

God of impossible love, you needed Mary to give consent, to bear the scandal, to carry your word within herself: may her courage give hope to women and men who yearn to sing new songs of justice and find the world a dwelling place for God; through Jesus Christ, the one who is to come.

A Collect for the Fourth Sunday of Advent, Prayers for An Inclusive Church

THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26; Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38

DECEMBER 24, 2017

ST. MARK'S-IN-THE-VALLEY

EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND PRESCHOOL

Los Olivos, California

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THE GOSPEL READING: LUKE 1:26-38

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.

What is God planning *for you?*

What is the message of the angel *for you?*

What is God planning *for us?*
What is the message of the angel *for our world?*

We are used to seeing Mary on pedestals or medallions, in

images that show her as special, separate, most holy and spoken of as unlike us.

And the truth is we may want her in our lives in that way: as a sacred *other*.

And yet.

God reveals in Mary the opposite.

Mary was not an elite, spiritually or otherwise.

Female in a patriarchal culture, a youth with no standing of her own, betrothed but not settled in her husband's home and family, impoverished, from an out-of-the-way village, born into a religious minority, uneducated... the list can go on.

There could not be a person less invested in distinction or influence or opportunity – one among many then and now.

And God chose Mary.

And even in this choosing by God, Mary did not see herself as ready for a pedestal, ready to go down in the annals of history, on an inside track in an influential religious and cultural institution. She didn't "own" the distinction.

Her response?

Perplexity, pondering, questioning, allowing ...

We're used to looking on as others get what they want, as others win the lotto, as others get ahead. We're slaves to a celebrity culture, to recognition, to having a place in the world, be it ever so humble, perhaps, but at least it is ours.

And Mary experienced none of this. She didn't have a foothold to call her own.

But we sideline ourselves from God's attention, God's

presence, from the message of the angel because we don't have a pedestal like Mary. No one is offering to put our image on a holy medal or a candle... though I'm guessing we can all do all of that for ourselves online now.

We rationalize that Mary must have been entirely different from us – secretly. And God sent the angel because God knew she was, in some way worthy as no one else in the whole world was worthy.

We insist God see as we see.

That God act as we would act.

That the message of the angel be only offered as we would offer it.

And with us in charge, not just anyone is getting this kind of attention, this kind of favor.

And so the message of the angel is a bounce back or it drops into our junk mail or we hang up, frustrated by the telemarketers, or push by the stranger in our way, complain about indigestion or insomnia in the early morning hours, and are generally busy, way too busy to simply be in the presence of the one who is with us always.

Movers and shakers, we think, are in cities or have some inside connection that we don't have. The best we can do is get a bargain or find a product or hear some tidbit of gossip. We are not in the realm of possibility that was

open to Mary. No angels are coming to us....

We're not even getting the best invitations to holiday parties!

Today, it will be a beginning to simply recognize there was no promise of a pedestal, no plans for a statue or basilica, nothing being offered to Mary as pay off or pay back.

And all of that associated with Mary is another expression of human perversity – a constant pattern to remove the wildness, the freedom of God from the world, to keep the control in the ways we understand control....

For Mary: only questions, perplexity, pondering, some fear, and simple allowing of reality to be reality.

What can you allow?

What can we allow?

What can our world allow?

What of God's possibility, what message of the angels can we receive, each of us and all of us together?

What, for instance, can this faith community be if we do not insist if fit a certain, typical pattern we think we understand?

Mary insisted on nothing being the way she expected or wanted it to be. There were no perks for her, no arriving, no

achieving of her dream job or the life she always wanted. No resting on her laurels, no retirement with benefits.

Can we be available?

Can we hear this story as God's way of being with us?

God is not looking for the royals, the innocent, the good, the most capable, the most beautiful or handsome, the youngest, the most hip, those who inhabit the centers of power....

God is constantly assembling a motley crew, with or despite the distinctions of the world, not at all as we imagine.

As we'll hear through this day, this season and the rest of the story, that crew will include shepherds, a poor carpenter, foreign astrologers, aging prophets, fisherfolk, tax collectors, the ill, the lame, the off-scouring of the margins....

God is the original imagination.

And God chooses.

God chooses Mary. And you. Us. And many others we would never choose.

What is God planning? What is the message?

For you?

For us?



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