

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16

Romans 16:25-27

Luke 1:26-38

Canticle 3

A sermon preached by the Rev. Susan Pinkerton
Rector, St. John's, West Hartford, CT

“Yes...Here Am I”

Today we come out of the shadows of Advent with the feast of the Annunciation. It is a timeless yet mysterious story of when the Angel Gabriel visits Mary, a lowly young maiden from a small no name village. During this heavenly encounter Mary agrees to become the very mother of God here on earth – Theotokos, the bearer of the Christ Child, the very One who will usher in the Kingdom of Heaven here on earth. The impossible becomes possible when Mary has the wherewithal to say “yes” to the Angel. Ironically, for us the Advent season of waiting with great hope and expectation comes to an end today. But now, for Mary, the season of waiting with hope and expectation is just beginning.

It begins when Mary says “yes, here am I.” At this moment Mary welcomes and receives the divine Mystery within her very body, her womb. She is overcome with the Holy Spirit. This is the miracle of the Incarnation; God breaking into human history and becoming flesh and blood just like you and me. It is at this moment when temporal time (kronos) and eternity (kairos) intersect. This reveals how much God cares and loves us; in the act of greatest humility God empties himself, becoming fully human in the form of a helpless infant.

What is so amazing about the story of the Annunciation is that Mary says “yes.” She agrees to cooperate and work alongside the Spirit, as if in a holy partnership. Mary could have just as easily said no, which would be most understandable.

What did Mary risk by saying “yes?” In first century Palestine most women were engaged at the young age of 13 or 14, hardly an adult by today’s standards. In the ancient Jewish culture for a girl to become pregnant out of wedlock was scandalous. It not only tarnished a young girl and her family’s reputation, but it could also cost her her life.¹ The accepted punishment for an unwed mother was stoning by the local villagers. When we take all this into consideration we begin to have a much deeper understanding and appreciation for the incredible risk Mary took when she courageously said “yes.”

If you recall when the Angel approaches Mary on of the first thing he utters is “the Lord is with you...Do not be afraid.” These are much needed words of comfort and assurance that come from God. Mary needed to know that she was are not alone but that

¹Debie Thomas, <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/Essays/20141215JJ.shtml>, last accessed on 12/20/2017.

God was with her. Maybe this is what gave Mary the courage to finally say “yes, here am I.”

You and I need this same reassurance; to know that God loves and cares enough to be with us always. “The Lord is with you...Do not be afraid.” If we truly believe this, then we can also, like Mary, have the courage to risk saying, “yes” to God, “here am I.”

When we do things begin to change. Our priorities shift as we realize that we are part of something bigger than ourselves. We no longer live only for ourselves but for God and each other. In saying “yes” we make way for miracles to happen in very ordinary lives. It begins by saying “yes.”

Just a few days ago I attended the ordination of candidate for the priesthood. It was a very moving, beautiful service as are all ordinations. But, this particular ordination was unlike any other I have attended. At one point in the service all is hushed as the candidate walks up to the front of the church and stands alone before the bishop. She is dressed in a plain white alb. As part of the ordination liturgy the bishop asks her several questions about her call to the ordained ministry. After each question she answers “yes.” I could hear the resolution and sincerity in her voice as she answers “yes” each time. I am close enough to see that her body is trembling ever so slightly as she responds. After the questioning the candidate turns around to face the congregation to be vested for the first time with her priestly vestments, a bright red stole and chasuble. As she turns to face the congregation and it is quite obvious that she is pregnant, great with her child, her first born. She is absolutely glowing, radiating the hope and promise of a new life as a new priest but also for the new life that is within her.

I immediately thought of Mary. I wonder if she were trembling when she said “yes” so long ago. She must have been terribly frightened not knowing what she was getting herself into. And, yet, she said yes. And, thank God she did. The new life that grew within her is the source of new life offered to us all. But, we must be willing to have the courage to say “yes” to the possibility of new life. In saying “yes” to God, we make our selves vulnerable. Life can get more complicated and sometimes messy when we open ourselves to God working in our lives. Often, we find ourselves far outside our comfort zone, unsure of what to do or say. We open up ourselves to experiencing the unknown and unfamiliar, doing things we could never imagine ourselves doing in a million years. Yet, in saying yes, we know what it means to be fully alive. We live life large – beyond anything we could hope to do on our own. But, like Mary, we say yes because we know we are not alone. We become the bearers of Christ’s love in the world as we hear, “the Lord is with you...Do not be afraid.”

After the newly ordained priest was vested with her bright red stole and chasuble, she knelt before the bishop for his final blessing. The bishop laid his hands on her bowed head and at the same time, about 15 priests, vested in their red stoles gathered round her, reached out and laid their hands on shoulders. We all prayed. It was clear that God was near. It was as if Gabriel’s message was echoing throughout the church, reassuring us all, “the Lord is with you...do not be afraid.”

Amen.