

Year B, December 24, 2017
4 Advent
Christ Church, Mexia

O Lord, what surprising ways you have for opening our lives! When we least expect it, you are doing something wonderful with us. We are witnesses to your incarnation through the young Mary who said yes and offered herself as your servant. May our willingness to be your servants be equal to that of Mary. Amen.

Paula D'Arcy is "a writer, retreat leader, and conference and seminar speaker, travels widely in the United States, Canada, and abroad. She is also President of Red Bird Foundation, which supports the growth and spiritual development of those in need as well as those invested in the opening of the heart and the healing of this world." She resides in Austin, by the way, and she says: "God comes to us disguised as our life." Upon reflection, I believe she is right. At least, that has been my experience. How many of us have been visited by an Angel of the Lord, in the way we hear in the story of Mary today? That's a dramatic entrance! And I daresay it is not an experience one would likely forget. I think for most of us God's contact is more subtle than that.

When we listen to or read scripture, or hear someone tell a story, I think we usually hear or view it in the third person – as though we are observers, rather than participants. But it may be useful at times to try to see the story from the eyes of one of the characters of the story. And perhaps, when we think about this particular story there is a tendency to view it from Mary's perspective.

However, Frederick Buechner, in his book *Peculiar Treasures* looks at it from the viewpoint of Gabriel,

"She struck the angel Gabriel as hardly old enough to have a child at all, let alone this child, but he had been entrusted with a message to give her and he gave it. He told her what the child was to be named, and who he was to be, and something about the mystery that was to come upon her. 'You mustn't be afraid, Mary' he said. And as he said it, he only hoped she wouldn't notice that beneath the great, golden wings, he himself was trembling with fear to think that the whole future of creation hung now on the answer of a girl."

Wow, the whole future of creation hung now on the answer of a girl, almost a child herself. When we look at the story from this perspective, we see what her decision meant for us, for the world!

Recall, of course, that God grants us free will; Mary was free to say no. Suppose she had – did God have a contingency plan? Was there another virgin, righteous enough, whose fiancé was of the House of David? There were conditions that were needed to fulfill the Jewish prophecies, if people were to believe that Jesus was the Messiah. Not just any virgin would do. But I am confident that God would have found a way, because we, humans, often thwart the will of God.

Thankfully though, she said yes – “let it be with me according to your word.” God’s will was done in this case. God respects our freedom as well; so, the question we need to answer is whether or not we will be able, and willing, to say yes to God’s calls for our lives? Or will God have to go with plan B? And I said calls, the plural form, because I don’t believe it is just “one and done.” I believe that God needs us to do different things at different times in order for God’s will to be done. For example, with Mary it wasn’t just the birth – she needed to raise Jesus in a way that led to his development, she had to be there for his ministry, and for his death - and then after his death. So as important as this particular decision was, it was just the beginning.

Br. Robert L’Esperance, SSJE, reminds us: “If our faith does not lead us to action, then it has become a dead creedal affirmation of lifeless beliefs.” I realize that some of you are already giving your time, talent and treasure to the limits of your ability; others, maybe not. In either case, I believe we are always to be open to God’s call.

Watchman Nee, a Chinese church leader who helped establish the Christian church there about 100 years ago, professed a similar thought: “To what are we to be consecrated? Not to Christian work, but to the will of God, to be and to do whatever he requires.”

We have come through this time of Advent, this time of watching, waiting and rejoicing, to a time in which we can behold the indescribable love and mercy in all of God’s new creation. Open our hearts today, God, help us to heed your call, and to say yes, as in the words of the beautiful song:

“Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night.
I will go, Lord, if you lead me.
I will hold your people in my heart.”

And may you be richly blessed.

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word, and the Spirit.
Amen.