

John Sampson
"Let It Be"
Text: Luke 1:26 - 38
Preached at KVCC
December 24, 2017

Will you pray with me?

God may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you our rock and our redeemer. AMEN.

On this final Sunday in the season of Advent, when we've lit the fourth candle of our wreath, we stand at the very threshold of the joy of Christmas. Advent has been for us a journey through time, through story, and through the inner workings of our own yearning hearts. Over the last three weeks we've heard stories of stars falling out of the heavens. We've confessed the ways we hurt ourselves, and those around us, on slips of paper and drown them in our baptismal font as a sign of repentance. We've taken on the words of the prophet and voiced God's call to radical action in our lives, and

in the life of the world. All of this we've done to prepare ourselves for the birth of the Christ child, not just out there, out there in our cold, dark world, but also in here in the warm intimacy of our own hearts.

And now God invites us to take one final step. It is the step that will move us out from the waiting and expectancy of Advent, and deliver us to the wonder of Christmas.

And this final step begins with the arrival of God's messenger Gabriel, who tells Mary all those years ago, and tells the rest of us here and now, that we have found favor with God.

We have found favor with God. You and me. All of us.

No wonder Mary reels, and seems speechless and disoriented by Gabriel's words. They seem too big, and too deep to be able to be contained by the human mind.

We have found favor with God.

Are these words a thunderclap that make your thoughts dull? Do they seem too outrageous for you to process? Do they seem like a mistake?

Perhaps.

But Gabriel doesn't stop there. God's messenger is just getting going.

Seeing the look of disbelief and terror on Mary's face, seeing the look of confusion and horror on our faces, Gabriel tells us that we will bear a child, and his reign will be everlasting.

If you remember our reading from last week what Gabriel is telling us is that we will bear within ourselves a new being, a new humanity that will live to bring good news to the oppressed, bind up the brokenhearted, and proclaim liberty to the captives. This is what God has chosen each one of us for, this is the reason we have found favor with the Holy One.

And in the face of this tidal wave of good news that threatens to drown her Mary puts the breaks on and does something so human. She asks the obvious, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"

At the very gate to Christmas, as God announces to each one of us that we will bear Christ into this world by fundamentally changing the nature of our lives, how do we put the breaks on God?

Do we respond to God's invitation by asking:

"How can this be...I'm retired?"

"How can this be...I have health issues?"

"How can this be...I'm raising my kids?"

"How can this be...I have a hard time making ends meet?"

How can this be...because I fundamentally can't believe God chose me for this, for any of this.

God hears us through her messenger; she hears all of the reasons we feel we can't accept her offer; she hears us voice all of our limitations, and all of our disbelief. And she responds to Mary, and to all of us, and she tells us, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you." We won't be alone, and we won't have to change our hearts, and change the world, all by ourselves. God promises us that she will be there to help us transform into beings of greater compassion and deeper love, to help us give birth to a new humanity in our hearts.

And now we come to the final step in our journey to Christmas, to the birth of the Christ in our world. Buffeted by the news that God has chosen each one of us to become ministers of her new kin-dom, to become people who bring a garland of peace to the world, instead of the ashes of mourning, what will we do? What will we choose?

We are given this story of the annunciation at the end of Advent, instead of at the beginning where it seems it should logically appear,

because God has been preparing us over the last three weeks to answer the question she now puts before us. Will we accept her offer? Will we be the wombs that birth the Prince of Peace in our land?

Mary answers Gabriel I think without being fully sure of what she is assenting to. How could she really know what the road ahead will bring her – both the most profound human joy, and the most horrifying inhumanity? But she takes that leap of faith and she answers the angel with the words:

“Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”

What will our response be standing here at the end of Advent? Will we respond with a leap of faith as Mary did, or will we choose a different path? Will we enter into the majesty of Christmas born

within our hearts and transform ourselves to accept the possibility of new life, or will we keep to the familiarity of our lives as we know them?

This is the question of Christmas.

This is the question that God asks all of us to answer.

How will you answer God?

I end this reflection with the lyrics from a nontraditional Christmas carol, but a carol I think most of you will recognize anyway. It is a carol based on the words of Mary, based on her acceptance of God's invitation. And I hope as I sing these lyrics they might just be words that you can embrace on this Christmas Eve.

Let it be.

Let it be.

Let it be.

Let it be.

Whisper words of wisdom.

Let it be.

AMEN.