

Daily Discipleship

Fourth Sunday of Advent (B) – Luke 1:26-38

An Attitude of Discipleship: *Trusting*

Focus Question: *What does it mean to trust God as a faithful disciple?*

word of life

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

Luke 1:38 (NRSV)

Read Luke 1:26-38

The story of Jesus’ birth begins to be told this Fourth Sunday in Advent. It is a story of an extraordinary visitation of an angel who tells of a miraculous conception, yet it is rooted in an ordinary town (Nazareth) and in a common young girl (Mary) whose simple faith and trust stand throughout the ages as a model of faithful discipleship.

The timing of the angel Gabriel’s visit to Mary (known in the church calendar as the “annunciation” – the “announcement”) is identified within the context of the story of the announcement of the birth of John the Baptist. “In the sixth month” (Luke 1:26 NRSV) refers to the sixth month of Elizabeth’s (Mary’s cousin) pregnancy. It might be helpful to read Luke’s account of the announcement of John’s birth (Luke 1:5-25).

1. *What similarities do you see in the two accounts? What differences?*

The angel Gabriel begins with a common word of greeting (translated “greetings” or “hail”), but the remainder of Gabriel’s message is anything but ordinary! Mary is addressed as “favored one,” and when Mary seems perplexed by what the greeting means, the angel assures her, “Don’t be afraid,” and again says to her, “You have found favor with God.” (Luke 1:30 NRSV)

2. *What is the significance for Mary of having found “favor with God”?*
3. *What reassurance does this give us when we contemplate what God is calling us to do as disciples?*

Gabriel then gets to the heart of his message. Mary will conceive and give birth to a child – no ordinary child, to be sure, but “the Son of the Most High” (Luke 1:32 NRSV). This child is clearly identified as the promised Messiah – the fulfillment of the prophet Isaiah’s prophecy. (Isaiah 9:6-7)

Mary’s initial response is that of puzzlement: “How can this be?” She is but a young girl who has not had sexual relations. The answer: through the power of the Holy Spirit which will “come upon” and “overshadow” her.

The word “overshadow” (Luke 1:35) is the same word used in the Old Testament to describe God’s presence resting on the tabernacle in the pillar of cloud in the Sinai desert (Exodus 40:35). And just as the Spirit moved over the waters of creation, bringing forth life out of nothing, so God’s Spirit will move again to bring about something new.

Mary’s response is one of obedient trust. “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word” (Luke 1:38 NRSV). Her question, “How can this be?” is turned into an affirmation of trust, “Let it be so.” In a few short phrases, the plan of God is revealed. Just as God is able to bring about the birth of John in Elizabeth (who is beyond child-bearing years), God is able to accomplish the virgin birth of Jesus through Mary. “For nothing will be impossible with God.” (Luke 1:37 NRSV)

word among us

“Who, me? You’ve got to be kidding!” “Why ... We’ve never done it like that before.” “I don’t think I can do that!” “Are you sure you want me?”

Sound familiar? We often speak similar words when presented with an opportunity to stretch, to go beyond our “comfort zones,” to dare to venture out into uncharted territory. Change and challenge are difficult. They bring anxiety and confusion; they can turn our world upside down.

We can identify with Mary’s initial response to the angel’s announcement that she was to give birth to the Christ. Our text tells us she was “much perplexed” and needed time to ponder just what all the commotion was about (Luke 1:29). Her first words were a question: “How can this be?” (Luke 1:34 NRSV)

1. *Recall a time when you were challenged and stretched to do something new. How did you respond?*

The angel Gabriel reminded Mary of the power of God’s Holy Spirit – the same power that through God’s word brought life out of nothing in creation, the same power that brought budding life to elderly Elizabeth. With this Spirit, the impossible is possible. And Mary’s words quickly changed from a question, “How can this be?” to an affirmation of willing trust: “Let it be with me according to your word.”

2. *Take a moment and silently meditate on Mary’s prayer. What thoughts come to mind?*

As faithful disciples of Christ, we, too, have been called to do new and exciting things. God has blessed us with unique gifts and talents, and God has placed us in opportunities to use and share the gifts. We may wonder at times whether we have the right “stuff” to do what we are called to do. The task often seems impossible. We know ourselves only too well – our weaknesses, our failings, our lack of experience.

Even as we speak our doubts and reservations, we hear the story of two women: Elizabeth, too old to conceive; and Mary, too young. If God’s Spirit was able to move in each of them to do the impossible, who knows what “impossible” ventures God is birthing within you? The angel’s assurance to Mary is also a word of comfort to each of us: “Don’t be afraid, for you have found favor with God. The Holy Spirit will be with you.”

May our response be as Mary’s: “Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” (Luke 1:38 NRSV)

3. *How does an attitude of trust develop?*
4. *What are some barriers which block us from trusting God?*
5. *How might we incorporate Mary’s prayer in our daily life?*

Prayer

Come, Lord Jesus and be our guest. Grant us bold and trusting faith, that we might be instruments and bearers of your love. Amen

Dig Deeper

Isaiah 9: 2-7

last word

Each day this week, pray Mary’s prayer:
“Let it be with me according to your word.”



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