

Katy Heinzl
Advent III: "Mary"
December 14, 2014

The sermon today is broken into three sections, focusing on different parts of this story. A story full of symbol. I invite you to hear this story of new life metaphorically. Hold it loosely, with open hands, open heart, open mind. I invite you to take in the pictures, the music, the words, and create space for something new.

Luke 1:

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, favoured 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 favour 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 for ever, 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.

Slide show of classical paintings of Annunciation as well as statues and modern day pictures of women/girls in 'waiting' stance. Music by Daryl Snider.

Section 1:

(to be read by someone in audience, who stands, with microphone)

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Katy:

"She was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be."

Mary was perplexed, confused, afraid but not shut down. She was perplexed and she pondered what was being said. Mary was practicing "beginner's mind". Beginner's mind is a term used in Zen Buddhism. Beginner's Mind is an empty mind; a ready mind. It's always ready for anything; it is open to everything. Suzuki Roshi, Zen master, says "In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities but in the experts there are few." Mary is open to possibility. She is open to receive, to be changed and to change.

Mary is scared. She doesn't know what's happening, yet she keeps her heart open. She keeps her mind open. This remaining open in the midst of uncertainty takes great courage. There's nothing wimpy about keeping ourselves open to learn and receive new life. It takes courage and fierceness; for the nay sayers, within and without, find us. Mary knows, instinctively, that this openness is going to be a game changer. It's going to require a Beginner's Mind again and again and again.

And she doesn't shy away from the perplexity. She ponders... she remains open.

"In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities; in the experts, few."

To what are you being asked to open your heart and mind this season?

Interlude of music and slideshow (2-3 minutes)

Section 2:

(to be read by someone in audience, who stands, with microphone)

The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour 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 for ever, 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.'

Katy:

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"

A Virgin is one who is free, unbound. Whole. Male or female.

Author Helen Luke writes that the creative masculinity of the spirit is meaningless unless it enters into feminine receptivity. No man can create anything without the equal participation of the woman - both literally and figuratively. She suggests, in working with the ancient Chinese symbols of yin, feminine, and yang, masculine, that in every creative act or transformation - intellectual, emotional or physical - the male and the female, the active and the passive, are of equal importance. Even God could not transform into man without the free consent of Mary.

This is where understanding the metaphor is crucial. This isn't about being a man or a woman. Each of us has both feminine and masculine aspects within ourselves. Women have a masculine aspect and men have a feminine aspect. To create anything - new ideas, new art, new people, there must be a coming together of the masculine and the feminine. And true creativity requires freedom and consent.

"Even God could not transform into man without the free consent of Mary." writes Helen Luke.

She challenges each of us to rediscover in ourselves the hidden beauty of receptive devotion - of Mary's willingness to receive. It is from this receptivity that wholeness and co-creation with God is possible.

Mary made space within her "beginner's mind" for the impossible. She consented to the Holy Spirit entering and creating something, someone, both human and divine.

How might you create that space, that receptivity, to welcome the Spirit of God to bring about new life with you? In you?

Interlude of music and slideshow (2-3 minutes)

Section 3:

(to be read by someone in audience, who stands, with microphone)

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.

Katy:

"Here am I, the servant of The Lord, let it be with me according to your word."

These words of Mary "here I am" are words echoed throughout the OT. Words spoken at pivotal points in the story between God and humanity. Moses, in the desert, in a land far

from his home, stops what he's doing, turning aside to notice a burning bush. The Lord calls him by name "Moses! Moses!" and Moses replies "here I am". Out of this encounter Moses' life is turned upside down, and the birth of freedom for the enslaved Israelites began.

Samuel, a young boy serving in the temple, runs to his master Eli again and again when he is stirred in his sleep. "Here I am" he replies. From this encounter with the Holy One, Samuel grows and leads the Israelites into a new relationship with God.

And now we read of Mary saying "here I am". She, too, is birthing a new way of understanding God.

Moses, Samuel, Mary. There were thousands of years between Moses and Samuel, thousands of years between Samuel and Mary. It's easy for me to lump the stories of the OT into a short span of time. They all happened really, really long ago. The NT too - it's all ancient history. But for Mary the stories of Moses and Samuel were ancient history as well. They happened thousands of years before her time. It makes me wonder about the thread of story. This story, this beckoning of something new. This openness and saying "here I am" continues to this day. The time line from Moses to Samuel to Mary to Us, in this time and place. It's all part of the continuum.

What impossible thing is waiting within you to be born? What, in this season of expectation, of darkness, of quiet waiting, might God be whispering to you? Is there something waiting to be birthed? Some idea, some new way of being?

New life may be something external - a bringing forth of a new idea into the world. But new life may happen on the interior plane, not evident to anyone else. These births are just as significant as external changes. A new way of being, with ourselves, with our neighbor, with God, may be the noticing and new life stirring within.

God beckons each one of us - calls us, waiting for us to say "here I am". What crazy, impossible newness might be growing inside? As you go forth, remember the words of the angel before he left Mary "For nothing is impossible with God." Amen

End sermon time with music.

Suzuki, Shunryu, 1970. *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*. Weatherhill, Boston.

Luke, Helen, 1981. *Woman Earth and Spirit, The Feminine in Symbol and Myth*. Crossroads Publishing Co., NY.