

I will be the first to admit that having Advent 4 and Christmas Eve fall on the same day is a bit challenging. For me it's a lot of sermons in a short period of time; other people will have already moved onto the celebration of Christmas Eve and the busyness which that entails and may not even be present to make the transition through this fourth Sunday of Advent. Missing Advent 4 is like eating dessert before you've finished your vegetables.

But having Advent 4 and Christmas Eve on the same day is also a gift because we have an opportunity to compress time and space in an amazing way. In the morning we hear the gospel of the Annunciation, that moment when Mary hears from the Angel Gabriel that she is to bear a son and in the evening we will hear about the birth of that son, the radical story of the God who became human on our behalf.

There's some real drama in these stories, in what was told and what was left untold. Luke does a great job of depicting the conversation between Mary and the Angel. She doesn't freak out when Gabriel tells her that the Lord is with her or that she will bear a son who will be really important. She is a bit confused about the mechanics of how she is going to become pregnant without knowing a man but overall she takes the news pretty well.

Since Mary was a young woman she was probably living at home with her parents and I do wonder how they received the news. Not to mention the neighbors and her espoused husband Joseph. Matthew addresses Joseph's concern in his telling of the birth story but Luke's focus is on Mary and Mary's "yes" because her "yes" is one of the significant moments in salvation history.

Mary responds to the Angel by saying "Here am I... , the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Her words are similar to those of others who have been chosen by God.

Think Moses being hailed from a burning bush only to be told by God that he was going to challenge Pharaoh and lead God's people out of Egypt. Moses took some convincing and a lot of help – his brother Aaron and his sister Miriam for starters. Then there's Samuel the prophet who would anoint first Saul and then David as kings of Israel. Samuel was a young boy in apprenticeship to the priest Eli when he heard a voice calling in the night. Although he didn't recognize the Lord, he responded "Here I am" to the voice and when Eli heard about his experience he knew that Samuel had been singled out by God.

The prophet Isaiah had a vision in which a seraph held a live coal to his lips and heard a voice saying "Whom shall I send, and who will go

for us?” And the prophet replied “Here am I; send me!” These are just a few of the call stories found in Holy Scripture.

Most of these stories are about men who were being called to active ministry on the Lord’s behalf. They would speak for the Lord, they would challenge secular rulers for the Lord, and they would find their lives turned upside down for the Lord. Being called by God is not a comfortable thing. That passage from Isaiah is one of the readings for the ordination of a priest and some of you will remember that at one point during that service we end up face down on the floor, arms outstretched signifying our obedience to God and our willingness to surrender to God’s call.

But Mary, well Mary had the traditional woman’s role of watching and waiting. In her Magnificat she prophesizes great things about the Lord and how God will cast down the mighty and lift up the lowly but it is not Mary who will be doing so on behalf of the Lord, she will give birth to the one who will do so. Mary will wait for her womb to swell in pregnancy. She will wait for her son to be born. She will watch Jesus grow into manhood. She probably hoped that he would get a steady job as a carpenter instead of wandering off into the desert to preach. But Mary had said “yes.” She had the words of the Angel to ponder as well as the words of the shepherds who came to her at Jesus’ birth.

There's a popular song called *Mary did you know?* (Lamont Savory / Buddy Greene / Mark Lowry / Courick Clarke / William Barclay / Wayne Buchanan) The lyrics ask what Mary knew about the child that was to be her son.

Mary did you know that your baby boy will one day walk on water?

Mary did you know that your baby boy will save our sons and daughters?

Did you know that your baby boy has come to make you new?

This child that you've delivered will soon deliver you

Mary did you know that your baby boy will give sight to a blind man?

Mary did you know that your baby boy will calm a storm with his hand?

Did you know that your baby boy has walked where angels trod?

And when you kiss your little baby, you have kissed the face of God

Mary did you know, Mary did you know, Mary did you know

The blind will see, the deaf will hear and the dead will live again

The lame will leap, the dumb will speak, the praises of the lamb

Mary did you know that your baby boy is Lord of all creation?

Mary did you know that your baby boy will one day rule the nations?

Did you know that your baby boy is heaven's perfect Lamb?

This sleeping child you're holding is the great I am

Mary did you know, Mary did you know, Mary did you know?

Yes, Mary knew. Mary would watch as Jesus challenged the religious establishment and she would watch as he challenged the Empire of Rome, and she would watch as he died on the cross.

Most parents will not see their children grow up to be the saviors of the world but mothers the world over watch as their children grow up, they watch as their children struggle to find their places in the world, hopefully they watch and let their children make mistakes. They may cry for their children, they may bleed for their children, they may fight for their children, but still they watch.

There is love and support, and pain built into that watching but it is what mothers do.

And Mary did all those things because she had said “yes”. And even knowing what she knew, Mary still said “yes”.

We honor the Mother Mary, the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mary the *Theotokos* which means God-bearer in Greek, because Mary is a model for us all, a model for what it means to be responsive to God’s call; not because she was passive but because she said “yes” as we are called to say “yes” and to remain faithful to that “yes” throughout our lives. When we were baptized most of us had someone say “yes” on our behalf but as adults we are able to reaffirm that “yes” on a regular basis. We may not have angels popping into our living rooms to tell us

that God has marked us for some really difficult task but we all have our lives to live, to live in accordance with the will of God. This means that we are listening for what God expects of us, we are committed to the place and circumstances in which we find ourselves, whether at home, or at work, and in the communities in which we live, and we are called to change our lives when we hear God calling us to do so.

Therefore on this fourth Sunday of Advent it is fitting that we praise the woman who said “yes” with a prayer that celebrates the mystery of the Incarnation.

*Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee,
Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb,
Jesus.*

*Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of
our death.*

Amen.