

“We will sing of your steadfast love forever and
our mouths proclaim your greatness
to all generations.” AMEN!

(Sing!)

“Imagine all the people living life in peace
You... You may say I’m a dreamer
But I’m not the only one
I hope someday you’ll join us
And the world will be as one.”

John Lennon’s 1971 release was
a call to let people imagine different
ways of achieving peace.

It is always good to imagine, I think.

Like this morning, we are allowed
to imagine an angel showing up at our
workplace or in our home.

Imagine the angel making
a life-altering announcement.

Imagining helps us to be reminded of what
it must have been like for Mary to
have Gabriel come to her and give
her the news that we so often read

this time of year.

Now, I am glad we are familiar with it,
but with the familiarity we forget to imagine
just what it may have felt like for Mary
to have this happen.

Imagine being amazed (again!) that
Mary makes the response and
her declaration of trust, but know
that it didn't come immediately.

With a closer examination we note that,
when the Angel Gabriel showed up at her door,
she was deeply troubled.

Greatly troubled by this unanticipated visitor
and deeply vexed by the announcement
that (seemingly) come out of nowhere.

To those familiar with the Bible...
we are like... meh,
“another angel announcement.”

As if it happens to us everyday!

And everyday our answer to the angel is:
Let it be with me according to your word.

But, it is not like that for most of us.
at least, not for me.

Like Mary, we have every reason
to be utterly troubled by a stranger
showing up at the door and
making strange, and
vague announcements.

As Timothy Luke Johnson wrote,
“[Mary] was among the most powerless:

young in a setting and [culture] that valued age.

She was a woman and she was poor.

It's 3 unfortunate strikes.

Make no mistake, the stakes
were very high for Mary.

One wrong move could ruin her personal
and family reputation and jeopardize
her entire life.”

I'd add to that and say even
the entire lives of her family were at risk. (Pause)

Commentator Raj Nadella wrote that,

“In the end, Mary’s story stands out for
the impressive transformation from
her initial response of being afraid and
greatly troubled, to a query about how
this might be possible, to [the
final affirmation of her call to be transformed].”

And if there’s something sure
God desires from us,
it is transformation.

Think of the ways God
would want you to transform....

my mind thinks, “Oh, let me count the ways!” :-)

We think we can never do it, but
then there’s the voice of God, or
the act of God...

a voice or act that often comes
through other people or things and
gives an announcement and then
we find that a transformation has begun
and a step is taken to join
in God’s mission. (Pause)

I don't think I've ever noticed this before, but
Mary was offered some very
grand pronouncements:

“You are highly favored.
The Lord is with you.

You will give birth to a son.

He will be great and he will be called
the Son of the Most High.

The Lord God will give him
the throne of his father David, and
he will reign over Jacob's descendants
forever;

his kingdom will have no end.”

There is something like 7 major pronouncements there.

Statements that have historical and
political implications, promises of power and
joy for the future.

Yet, not one of them moved Mary to transformation.

Not one of them reassured her enough to quell
the anxiety and convince her

to join God's mission.

What was it that tipped the scale?

As we look back upon our lives and map out
the events that brought transformation
into our own selves, we may find the answer.

There may have not been an angel named Gabriel,
but there was probably a person that came
to you with a pronouncement.

Something was said, done, written,
by someone else that touched you,
in such the way, that God got your attention.

Made a divine claim;
an unbelievable announcement.

That alone was probably not enough
to transform you to God's mission,
so you asked questions... like Mary did.

"How can this be?"

"I don't get it?"

"What the (bleep!) are you talking about!? :-)

The pronouncement alone was not enough.

It is not enough to only be “touched,”
you asked questions (made replies)
and you listened to the answers given to you.

But even that wasn't enough to tip the scales
for Mary and probably nor was it enough for you.

Even when the angel said,
“The power of the Most High
will overshadow you,”

it was not enough for Mary.

The third, and final event, was when
Mary was given the news that Elizabeth was
also about to encounter a miraculous birth.

Mary arrived at the “Here I am,
the servant of the Lord,” acceptance.

When she had the assurance that
another woman,

someone she knew quite well,
would walk with her during
the unexpected journey.”

That was what finally brought her

to transformation and her need
to ask questions ended.

Dare I say it is like that for us?

The prospect of a shared experience,
a person to walk with during uncertain journeys,
is what mattered the most.

It is what brings each of us into God's mission. (Pause)

Highly favored ones, who come to
the Sunday morning Advent 4 service
(or watch from home) when it would be
so easy to say,

"I'll just go to the Christmas Eve service." :-)

Today's message is important
and it leads us into tonight's.

For we are a people who face difficult decisions
and trials but know now that what
matters most is that someone is there
to share in the experience with us and

we are there to share in the other's
experiences with them.

Stand with them.

Walk with them. Cry with them.

Rejoice with them. (Pause)

And then we enter tonight, knowing
that the simple assurances that God cares
for us is not very transformative, that is,

until we recognize that God's-Self will share
in the human experience and journey with us
in each and every lived context.

AMEN!