

Advent Week 2

Sunday 12/07

The theme for this week is *faith*.

The scriptures this week are Luke 1:26-45.

God of faith,

As we begin this week, open our hearts to hear your word anew and respond with courage. May we trust in your seemingly impossible promises and say yes to your call on our lives. Prepare us for the journey ahead.

Amen

Monday 12/08

Luke 1:26-34

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, favored 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 favor 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 forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"

God and Gabriel are busy. This time, God sends the angel Gabriel to Mary, who is engaged to Joseph (from the house of David), in the town of Nazareth in the region of Galilee. Despite the mention of Joseph's blood lines, the town and the region remind us that he's really a regular Joe, looking to start a life with Mary, one of the local girls. Gabriel interrupts those plans, telling Mary that she will become pregnant with a son, whom they will name Jesus. He is God's very own son, whose kingdom will not end like earthly kings, but go on forever. Mary, like Zechariah before her, asked Gabriel, "How can this be?"

This is where our Christmas story begins. So often, we rush to Jesus being born that we forget the faith of Mary (and Joseph) that allowed his birth to happen. Everything is stacked against them- women who became pregnant outside of marriage brought immense shame on their families, hers and his. Often, the punishment was death. Before we jump to Jesus in the manger, let us remember the courageous faith Mary and Joseph lived to believe the words of an angel.

Do you remember a time in your life when your faith took courage, when you needed to be faithful in your decision? How was your faith impacted as a result?

God of courage,

Grant us faith like Mary's- faith that says *yes* to you even when we are afraid. Grant us courage to trust in you, even when things look impossible.

Amen

Tuesday 12/09

Luke 1:35-38

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.

Our scripture passage yesterday left us hanging with Mary asking Gabriel how she was going to become pregnant with a son named Jesus, whose kingdom would have no end. If you remember last week, when Zechariah asked a similar question, he was struck mute.

Will Gabriel do the same to Mary? Gabriel does not. He actually answers her question. Then he tells her that her relative Elizabeth, who was too old to have children, is 6 months pregnant. Gabriel ends the conversation with, “For nothing will be impossible with God.”

Gabriel upends Mary’s life with God’s plans for her. Plans that change everything- for her, for Joseph, and for the world. And she says “yes” to Gabriel and God.

Mary affirms God’s call on her life with this statement, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”

Have you ever felt so certain about something that you were ready to go forward even though it seemed impossible or crazy to everyone else? How did you know that was the right path for you? What role did your faith play in your decision?

Faithful God,

Help us to recognize your call on our lives. May we respond with Mary’s courage and confidence, “Let it be with me according to your word.”

Amen

Wednesday 12/10

Luke 1:39-40

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.

Mary sets off immediately for Elizabeth’s house. This is not a walk across town. Mary treks approximately 100 miles to see Elizabeth. If she joined a caravan, she could have been there in two days. If she walked, covering around 20 miles a day, she could have reached Elizabeth’s house in 4-5 days. Even though she professed her belief and agreement to God’s plans, she probably wanted to verify that Elizabeth was, indeed, pregnant. Which would then confirm that she, too, was pregnant, as Gabriel foretold. Elizabeth’s pregnancy confirmed what Gabriel had told Mary.

No matter who you are, or how great your faith is, doubt may creep in. Mary's visit to Elizabeth doesn't diminish her belief in God. It's ok to ask questions and remain faithful. Sometimes we might need to take an unplanned trek to affirm and confirm what we believe is true. And all the while, we pray for God to show us the way.

Have you ever needed to walk and pray to figure something out? This week, take a pray walk-around your neighborhood, in a local park, or even while you are out shopping.

Gracious God,

Journey with us through our doubts and questions. When we need confirmation of your word, guide our steps and send us companions like Elizabeth who rejoice with us and affirm your faithfulness.

Amen

Thursday, 12/11

Luke 1:41-45

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

Two women with unexpected, and miraculous, pregnancies. Two babies who change the world, ushering new life for all of us.

There are 4 oracles, or divine messages, in this brief passage of scripture:

1. Elizabeth declares Mary blessed among women and blessed is her baby.
2. Elizabeth confesses Jesus as her Lord.
3. John leaps for joy in utero at the sound of Mary's voice.
4. Elizabeth blesses Mary for believing the angel, for believing in God's plan for her, and for being faithful in her unexpected pregnancy.

This story invites us to ask: How do we recognize God and God's plans in moments that are unexpected, and possibly even unwelcome?

God of miracles,

Open our eyes to recognize you in unexpected moments. May we be filled with joy at your presence. Blessed are we who believe.

Amen

Friday 12/12 and Saturday 12/13

How will you Sabbath with Faith this weekend?

God of sabbath rest,

Teach us to pause and trust. This weekend, help us to hold our faith gently, knowing that you are at work, even when we are still.

Amen.

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