

“Be Prepared for the Unexpected”

Luke 1:26-38

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Communion Devotion

Mary had a lot on her mind, like most brides-in-waiting do. She was engaged to a fine man by the name of Joseph, and they were planning a wedding.

There was much to do to have a wedding in that culture. The celebration and festivities lasted anywhere from one week to a month. This allowed people from all over the region to come to greet the new couple. Then, when the couple traveled to neighboring villages, they would be among friends who would know them and help them along their journey, providing lodging and food.

In addition to planning a wedding, Mary and Joseph were busy getting their home ready. Like most grooms, Joseph was building a house and the furniture that would go in it while Mary was filling her hope chest. You understand why the months prior to a wedding were very important and busy.

This was certainly true for Mary and Joseph. No doubt they were focused on all that had to be done before their wedding when God interrupted their plans with some startling news from the angel, Gabriel. Listen to Luke’s account from his first chapter.

²⁶In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸The angel went to her and said, ‘Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.’

²⁹Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.

³⁰The angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. ³¹You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. ³²He will be great and

will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David,³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.'

³⁴ 'How will this be,' Mary asked the angel, 'since I am a virgin?'³⁵ The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. The holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. ³⁶ Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. ³⁷ For nothing is impossible with God.'

³⁸ 'I am the Lord's servant,' Mary answered. 'May it be to me as you have said.' Then the angel left her.

Why did God interrupt Mary's plans? He had other plans for her, not that her plans were bad. As a matter of fact, Mary and Joseph's decision to get married, along with their thoughtful preparation, may have convinced God this very couple, filled with grace and truth, could be trusted to provide a good home for Jesus.

How did Mary respond to this divine interruption? At first she was afraid, and asked questions, as anyone would do. Ultimately, though, her words reveal the mind of an obedient and faithful disciple. *"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said."*

Are you surprised by Mary's response? I must be candid and tell you that I am. This kind of faith is rare, especially when the risks are so high. I am deeply impressed by her level of commitment to God and willingness to suspend her plans. Trading her dream for God's was a Christmas miracle.

New Testament scholar, Dr. Peter Rhea Jones, says that while Jesus is the mirror of God, Mary is the reflection of a true disciple. This young maiden, who laid her plans aside and said yes to God, shows all of us what it means to be a person of faith. "Mary's yes is contagious," according to Dr. Jones.

There are many Advent lessons in this passage, but I wish to focus upon only one as we prepare to take communion. **Advent is about letting God interrupt us.**

Dr. Lauren Winner, professor of Christian Spirituality at Duke Divinity School, says faith is about letting God interrupt us. The traditional Christmas story is a vivid example of this. Even the way Luke arranges the events supports Winner's perspective.

Luke interrupts the account of John the Baptist's birth to tell his readers about Gabriel coming to Mary with the news of her pregnancy. Just when you thought you were going to read more about Zechariah, Elizabeth and their son, Luke writes about another family whose plans were going to change dramatically.

I am not surprised. Luke seems very interested in Mary's participation in and response to what God was doing, just as he was others who were marginalized.

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How well do you handle interruptions? If you are busy and facing deadlines, I am confident they frustrate you.

Many of you have taken leadership courses and know how important it is to be organized, focused and driven. Distractions are the enemies of productivity and efficiency.

The God we serve, however, is full of surprises. Often, God is drawn to busy people and never makes appointments. This means ministry, the kind which impacts people when they need it most, occurs as a result of divine interruptions while we are busily carrying out our own plans.

This was true of the disciples Jesus called. Early in his ministry, Jesus met two brothers, Simon and Andrew, casting a net into the sea because they were fishermen. "Come, follow me and I will make you fishers of men," Jesus said. "At once, they left their nets and followed him," Mark 1:17-18.

One of the most memorable parables Jesus told was that of the Good Samaritan. On the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, a man was overtaken by thieves, beaten, robbed and left for dead. Two religious leaders came upon him but ignored him because they did not want to interrupt their plans. The third man that came along stopped and helped the desperate man. He cleaned and bandaged his wounds and then took him to an inn where he could receive more attention.

Did the Samaritan stop because it was convenient for him, or he was not busy? Evidently not, for he continued on his journey, but not before telling the innkeeper he would return to settle up with him for the man's care.

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I wonder if Mary and Joseph's favorable response to God's interruption of their wedding plans and dreams inspired Jesus to tell their story. Did their decisions shape and mold his values? Sure they did. I hope you will let them influence you, too.

Advent is about letting God interrupt us.

Is God trying to get your attention? **What do you think God wants you to know?** Perhaps God wants you to know...

...how important you are to Him and how much he loves you;

...your sins have been forgiven, and you can let go of the guilt which has plagued you so long;

...you are not alone as you face your challenges and struggles;

...he will help you carry the burdens which are wearing you down;

...if you trust Him, He will replace your fear with courage and despair with hope.

On the other hand, what do you think God wants you to do? Does God want to partner with you like He did with Mary to make hope visible? Does God want you to participate in what He is doing to make the world a better place for everyone? Does God want you to be the answer to someone's prayer for help?

I believe God does because God is a matchmaker who is always connecting needs with resources. He knows those who are in need of compliments, encouragement, companionship, comfort or assistance, and God works tirelessly to bring people into their lives who will provide these gifts. Perhaps God wants you to be one of these people.

I hope you will let God interrupt your busy life in the coming days as you prepare to celebrate Christmas. When you feel the nudging of the Spirit, respond as Mary did when Gabriel came to her.

"I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said."

Think about this as we gather around this table to remember the life of one who answered God's call and gave his life to make ours better. Ask God to help you be as trusting and faithful as Jesus was, as well as Mary and Joseph.