

In the Name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.



"The Nativity," by Gerard van Honthorst (1590-1656)

Intro

Mary said, "Yes."

And as a result of that "Yes" the whole world was changed.

But the important thing is, Mary said, "Yes."

I. Mary

A. *In the sixth month* – not the month of June – but the sixth month of **Elizabeth's pregnancy** – the story Luke has just told takes place.

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. And the virgin's name was Mary."* (v. 26-27)

2. *"And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.'"* (v.28)

3. Such a familiar beginning – it’s enough to flip a switch inside us that rocks us into all those cozy Christmas surroundings – Mary’s going to have a baby – and all is as it should be;

- but there is **so** much more to it than that.

4. And yet, for the skeptics among us, it this very story – of Angels and Virgin births – that make it so **impossible** to believe what we know to be true about Christmas.

5. But for Luke and the people he was writing to, this was essential.

6. In the Hellenistic culture in which they lived, the birth of an extraordinary person was often accompanied by signs and miraculous events;

- thus the prophecies and the appearance of an angel would have seemed familiar to them.

B. But if you strip away all “MAGIC” – all that we find so **cozy**, and others find so **difficult** – if you take all that away, you are still left with one irrefutable thing, and that is **Mary said, “Yes.”**

1. Now, it’s important to understand that Mary had some choice in the matter.

2. The difficult side effects of later attempts to make Mary seem more holy, such as the doctrine of the *Immaculate Conception* – that Mary was conceived without sin – makes her decision automatic and without question;

- but to do so also cheapens her **humanness** and the struggle she was going to have to make, both to answer the God’s call THEN and to live with the consequences.

3. A careful reading of the story shows that Mary did have some questions, before she said yes.

4. And while the only one Luke records, is the mechanics of “*How can this be, since I am a virgin?*” – I’m sure there were many more.

5. The wonderful Episcopal Writer and Preacher, Barbara Brown Taylor lists Mary's questions this way:

- "Hey, wait just a minute here ... answer me these!
- "Will Joseph stick around after he hears about all this?
- "Will my parents understand – and still love me?
- "Will my friends stand by me, or will I be the laughing stock of my high school for sleeping around?
- "Will the labor be hard?
- "Will there be someone there to help me when my time comes?
- "You say the child will be king of Israel, his future is set – but what about me? Will I survive his birth? What about me?"

C. I'm sure Mary had a question or two – but despite all of them, she was willing to say "Yes," and answer God's call.

1. And as a result of that "Yes," Mary becomes, as the Greek Orthodox Church refers to her, the *Theotokos*, the God-bearer.

2. Through her willingness to answer God's call, God's plan may now move forward, and God can take human flesh and walk among us, and establish a new relationship with us.

3. If you wanted to diagram this – it would look something like:
- YES = Theotokos = God-bearer.

II. Being God Bearers

A. And just as Mary answered YES, and became the first God-bearer, so too, each of us in our own way becomes a "**God-bearer**" as well.

1. Susanna Metz writes, "We too are given an invitation by God to be someone special.

2. "We may not have a personal visit from the angel Gabriel, but we are given invitations even so – every day.

3. “Each one of us has the opportunity to be a God-bearer, a *Theotokos*, as Mary was.

4. “We are invited to carry God to everyone we meet, offering God by means of our thoughtfulness, our kindness, our care and concern.” (Synthesis 2014)

B. How are YOU called to be a **God-bearer** in your life?

1. Who do you know who needs to hear the good news that God loves them – loves them for who they are, right now?

2. Of course, it will not be without cost – saying YES to God always has a cost – it had a cost for Mary, and it has a cost for you and me.

3. And that cost is that we are DIFFERENT – there is always something different about us as we try to bring God’s love into the world.

4. As we live into being God-bearers, we too will have much the same reaction and questions that Mary did:

- Scared – Wonderment – Accepting
- Who, me? How can I do this? Should I tell anyone?

5. But the Good News is that we don’t have to do it alone – God is with us.

III. Nothing is Impossible

A. That’s the first thing Gabriel tells Mary, isn’t it – “God is with you.”

1. And God is with US too, as we strive to answer God’s call to be God-bearers to our world.

2. We may think this is too hard – we may wonder if God got the right person, and didn’t make a mistake.

3. But we are the ones God asks to do this – we are the ones called to be God-bearers in our lives.

4. Remember the last thing Gabriel whispers in Mary’s ear, “*For nothing will be impossible with God.*” (v.37)

- “*For **nothing** will be impossible with God.*”

5. And what was true then, is true now – “*For nothing will be impossible with God.*”

6. And how do we know this, because “the Lord is with US.”

B. How do we live into this call to be a God-bearer in our time and place?

1. I’ll ask you again, who do you know who needs to hear the good news that God loves them – loves them for who they are, right now?

2. And how can we go about making God’s love known?

3. Here in a time of COVID – when we are called once again to shelter safer at home and not go out – who do you know who needs God’s love?

4. In a time of division and distrust – of racism and violence - of loneliness and despair – who do you know who needs to hear that they are a beloved child of the God who will never leave them?

5. How can you make a conscious effort to **bring God** to them?

6. How can you bring God into whatever situation you find yourself in and work to be kinder or a bit more caring toward those you know in need?

7. This Christmastide – how can you be a God-bearer in your life?

Conclusion

I close with these thoughts by the great German theologian and mystic **Meister Eckhart**:

*“We are all meant to be mothers of God.
For God is always needing to be born...”*

He goes on to say:

*“What good is it to me, if this eternal birth of the divine Son takes place unceasingly but does not take place within myself?
And what good is it to me if Mary is full of grace and if I am not also full of grace?
What good is it to me for the Creator to give birth to His Son if I do not also give birth to Him in my time and my culture?”*

What is God asking YOU to do?

- What is the Angel whispering in YOUR ear?

What is it going to cost you?

- Are you willing to accept that cost to be a God-bearer?



Mary said, “Yes.”

Let us Pray

God of impossible love, you needed Mary to give consent, to bear the scandal, to carry your word within herself: may her courage give hope to women and men who yearn to sing new songs of justice and find the world a dwelling place for God; through Jesus Christ, the one who is to come. AMEN.

(Shakespeare p. 45)

And now a musical meditation by Savana Thomas [Ave Maria]