

IV Advent & Christmas Eve: 4:30 pm

December 24, 2017

Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Luke's

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16

Isaiah 11:1-6

Romans 16:25-27

Luke 2:1-7, 2:8-14, 2:15-20

Luke 1:26-38

This Sunday has a dual identity in the church: 4 Advent and Christmas Eve. This gives us an opportunity that hasn't happened since 2006 to explore the connection between the annunciation by the angel Gabriel to Mary (4 Advent) and the birth of Jesus (Christmas Day).

All of the OT prophecies, all of the prayers by centuries of followers of God, came down to the moment when God sent one of his chief angel to have a talk with Mary. Gabriel delivered the plan for Jesus to be born to a 14 year old girl named Mary. She would bear a son; he would reign over the house of Jacob forever; and there would be no end to his kingdom. And now the whole future of creation hung on her answer. Imagine the angels in heaven being gathered around, holding their breath. "What will she say? Will she do it?" They would be anxious for the answer because they knew God's rule of free will; people have the freedom to answer "yes" or "no". There is no demand; but each of us has the freedom to decide whether to go at life on our own - or to go it with God.

God's plan had led to in this moment; when an angel stood before a teenage girl, answering her questions, trying to keep the anxiety out of his voice, as he and all the heavenly hosts, and even God, wait for her answer. Will she do it? Will she say, "Yes" to being the mother of Jesus?

We know the answer Mary gave: "Here am I, the servant of the Lord. Let it be with me according to your word." She chose to live her life for God; and her decision changed everything. The Episcopal priest and author Barbara Brown Taylor writes that by her decision, "Mary becomes the most important woman in the world simply because she is willing to say 'yes' to an angel's strange proposal, without a clue where it will lead her."

A priest friend of mine, John Buenz, was awarded the Bishop's Cross a few years ago. When he was presented that award he gave a short but powerful speech. He said that for the many years he was a rector, he was so busy that he was very careful about not over committing, and so he often had to

decline invitations. But when he retired, he decided that he would always start by saying 'yes' to invitations. He said that saying 'yes' has been the most exciting experience in his life.

Think about the awesome power of saying yes;

Yes, I will take the responsibility to get a driver's license.

Yes, I want to marry you.

Yes, I want children.

Yes, we will buy this home.

Yes, I will take that job.

Yes, I want you as my friend.

Yes Lord, I see that this baby Jesus is your decision to be present with us as a human being, who could then live among us and teach us what Godly love looks like.

Yes Lord, I accept you into my life; in fact, I ask you to direct my life as you wish.

Today we celebrate the birth of the baby Jesus. The joy and excitement we feel is not because we haven't experienced Christmas before; it is not because it is a new idea that we should celebrate the birth of God's Son.

The joy and excitement of Christmas is about each of us being given a fresh invitation to say 'yes' to God; just like Mary said 'yes', and Joseph said 'yes', and the shepherds, and wise men, and generations of Christians have said 'yes'. Yes, God, we celebrate your son; we celebrate your love for us; we celebrate having a new chance to hear the story of Mary's decision to be part of your plan, and the story of the angels rejoicing at his birth. And we celebrate with all the angels in heaven, "I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah." Merry Christmas!