

December 22nd, 2024
Devotional
“Jesus' Birth Announced”
Luke 1: 26-45

Monday: “Mary” - Luke 1: 26-27

It wasn't until a few years ago that I really started to think about how Advent calls us to slow down as we prepare. A good friend of mine started a tradition in his apartment at college. He and his roommates would not use any overhead lighting during the season of Advent. At night they would gather around the advent wreath or additional candlelight for devotions. This was a bit of a disruption to their schedules, which were so busy during the day that they would study at night. They quickly found that certain activities including studying and cooking, by limited candlelight do not tend to go well, so they had to shift their priorities and rearrange their schedules – preparing – so they could actively wait for the coming of the Lord each evening.

As much as I admire my friend for this celebration of Advent that he has carried with him into his new life with his wife, I haven't quite got to this point of preparing and waiting in my own life. But his dedication to preparing and waiting started to get me to think about Mary. Mary may be one of the best Biblical examples there is for preparing and waiting. Mary was probably thirteen years old when a messenger of the Lord named Gabrielle came to her to announce that she was pregnant. Mary's life up to this point had been one of waiting – waiting to become a mother and a wife. Preparing herself to bring honor to her family in these roles by practicing household duties for many years. Because this was quite an educational undertaking in and of itself, she probably never had any education outside of the home. Yet, Mary's life was one of preparing her for this moment, whether she realized it or not.

How is the season of Advent one of preparing and waiting for you?

Prayer: God, we often like the idea of preparing when it is for something that we are looking forward to. But it is harder for us to prepare for the unknown. Help us to have hearts of expectation that look to you as we prepare and wait, especially this Advent season. Amen.

Tuesday: “Engaged” - Luke 1: 27-28

Mary was now actively preparing for marriage. As was Jewish custom she would be engaged to her soon to be husband, Joseph, for a year. This would give him time to make the proper arrangements as well; carving out another room in his family's dwelling for them to live in. It needed to be big enough to accommodate them, and the one child they expected to create each year of their marriage together. Mary was preparing herself not only to be a good wife to Joseph, providing for his needs, but a good mother to as many children as she could bear successful. Mary hoped and prayer that she would be able to provide Joseph with a male offspring.

But before she could even be with Joseph, an angel came into her life and changed all that she had imaged. In fact, before birth of Jesus could even take place, the angel Gabrielle kept showing up in the story of Jesus's family. Gabrielle came to Jesus's Uncle Zechariah, father of John the Baptist, and told him that while his wife had been without child for many years, she would bear the one who was to prepare the way for the Lord. Then Gabrielle showed up again, this time to Mary, a virgin, and said that she would conceive and give birth to a son, who would reign over the house of David. Gabriel keeps showing up again and again in ordinary moments that change the course of history.

How do you imagine that Mary's life changed when she heard the words of the angel Gabriel?

Prayer: Lord, we admit that often we have our own ideas of how life should go. What we expect. What we desire. What we dream of. Yet, as we look at Mary, we see someone whose entire world was changed in one moment in a way she could never fully imagine. May we have open hearts like Mary's, so we can respond best to be your servants in this world. Amen.

Wednesday: "Supplied" - Luke 1: 29-34

Mary was preparing for the day, gathering water at the local citrine, probably not her first trip of the day, when this messenger appeared to her. Mary was going about her ordinary tasks of preparing when she was interrupted and told that another period, a new period, of waiting would begin. This one would last nine months – the time it would take to give birth to a baby boy. Mary knew how babies came to be and questioned the angel how she – one who had never known a man – would give birth. But the angel told her that the Holy Spirit would come upon her and she would bear a son, to be named Jesus, who would be the Son of God. For nothing is impossible with God.

Mary had to be thinking, why me?

When have there been times in your life when you have replied "why me?" What was that experience like? How does it help you relate to Mary in this moment?

Prayer: Lord, sometimes we can come up with what seem like a million reasons that you should choose someone else, you should use someone else. Sometimes we let our questions and doubts get in our way to respond to your call. Remove all stumbling blocks, by your grace, we pray. Let us not get in the way of your work in the world. Amen.

Thursday: "Your Relative" - Luke 1: 35-38

Mary is a little different than Zechariah in her encounter with Gabriel. She doesn't seem to be looking for proof or to all of the questions she must have answered. But Gabriel answers some anyway.

He tells Mary that she will come to bear this child by the Holy Spirit coming upon her. That the power of the Most High God will be over her, which is how she will come to bear not just any child, but the holy Son of God.

But the gift of Gabriel's words extend even beyond this absolutely daunting and humbling call on her life. He says that she will not have to go through this journey alone. For her cousin, Elizabeth, is also pregnant, despite how everyone else had said she was barren. Why? "For nothing is impossible with God".

How do you think the gift of Gabriel's explanation helped Mary to reply as she did?

Prayer: Lord, we often want all of the details worked out before we reply. We want to know exactly what is going to happen before we take the leap to follow you. But in Mary, we see someone who followed you even with all of her questions and all of the unknowns. We see this as an act of faith. Give us such faith, too, Lord, we pray. Amen.

Friday: "Sacrifice" - Luke 1: 26-38

We are now firmly in one of my favorite seasons of the year. When I was little, there were aspects of the holidays that captivated my attention – putting up the Christmas tree, unwrapping all of the decorations from the previous year and releasing their scent, being with family, the list goes on and on. But some of my most fond memories are within the church. Hanging ornaments on the Christmas tree. Being asked as a family to light the Advent wreath.

The Christmas pageant and brown bag dinner that preceded it. And holding my candle on Christmas eve.

But it wasn't until much later that I actually understood what this season – the season of Advent was about. Advent is the season that calls us to wait and prepare for the coming of our Lord, Jesus. And on how my preparations reflected anything but a spirit of waiting. From wanting to get from one activity to the next, or attempting to fit Christmas preparations into my existing schedule, or wanting to play certain Advent and Christmas hymns on the hand bells as fast as I could, my actions reflected an attitude of haste – one of simply adding Advent on top of everything else – instead of one of waiting.

Mary was not able to simply add the message of the Christ child on top of everything else going on in her world. She made sacrifices when we replied “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Some known, some unknown at the time. May the season of Advent usher us in to a time of waiting, preparing, and yes, even sacrifice, as we anew for the Savior.

How are waiting, preparing, and sacrifice part of your life? How can you incorporate them into this season?

Prayer: Lord, we don't want your birth to just be an add-on in our lives. We want it to be the center of our lives. Align our hearts and our priorities with yours, this season and beyond, so your Truth and Love may be made known.