

The One Who Said Yes
Luke 1:26-38
December 15, 2024 – Center Harbor Congregational Church, UCC
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Today – the third Sunday in Advent – is known as “Joy Sunday” or “Mary Sunday.” So, I thought it might be a good day to share with you something a little out of the ordinary, something not from scripture, but from tradition. I like this tradition that I am going to share with you because it helps us understand Mary as a real person, not some statue, not some perfect image captured in amber, but a real person for whom becoming the mother of Jesus would surely have been a daunting prospect, and looking at her this way makes clear the enormity of her “YES.” So, the tradition is this: What if Mary were not the first woman that the angel Gabriel came to. Rather, what if she was the one who said yes.

Thinking about this tradition led me to wonder just how many women the angel might have gone to before he got to Mary, and what did each of them say? You can imagine all the reasons that a young woman – a girl, really – might decline the angel’s invitation to become the mother of the child of God.

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Perhaps Gabriel went to Abigail first. He might have said, “Greetings, Abigail! No need to be afraid. I am the angel Gabriel, and I have great news for you! You are going to have a baby! Congratulations! And, the father is going to be ... God. No really! It’s a great honor to be the mother of the child of God. People will remember you for centuries! “And this child will be amazing! He will be smarter than you can even imagine. In fact, when he is just a boy, he is going to leave you in a big travelling crowd and you aren’t going to know where he is for two days! And when you find him, he will be teaching the old folks at the Temple a thing or two. Oh, but he is not just going to be smart. He’s going to love absolutely everyone.

“And, then, when he grows up, he is going to be baptized by your weird nephew John the wild prophet. Yes, that one. And your son is going to wander around the countryside with a group of scruffy friends, preaching and doing miracles. He is going to tell stories that confuse people, or heal their souls. And well, he will be homeless, and he will make a funny habit of sharing meals with outcasts.

“He is going to talk about the Kingdom of God, and how the last shall be first and the first shall be last. The poor people will love him! Some will even try to make him the King. They will even have a parade for him in Jerusalem!

“And ... well, full disclosure, all this is going to make the Romans really nervous, I have to tell you, and you know what happens when they get nervous. ... No, he’ll be just about 30. You will live to see it.... But here is the really great part: after just three days, he is going to rise from the dead!

“What do you say, Abigail? .... Well, yes, I know you aren’t married. We have a plan for that. And I know you are just 14, and this whole thing is a lot to take on, but this is a genuine offer from the Creator of Heaven and Earth.

“Hey! I’m an angel, you can’t just kick me out!”

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(Well, clearly that was the wrong approach. Maybe a little more of the good news.... So, Gabriel tries again.)

“Greetings, Deborah! No need to be afraid. I am the angel Gabriel, and I have great news! You are going to have a baby! Congratulations! And, the father is going to be ... God!

“And this child will be amazing! He will be smarter than you can even imagine. And he’s going to love absolutely everyone.

“And, then, when he grows up, he is going to wander around the countryside. He is going to talk about the Kingdom of God. The poor people will love him! They will even have a parade for him in Jerusalem!

“Well, you’re right. That is going to make the Romans really nervous, and you know what happens when they feel threatened. But then after just three days, he is going to rise from the dead!

“What do you say, Deborah? You had other plans? This is God we’re talking about here. The Creator of Heaven and Earth. Oh, okay.”

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“Greetings, Hannah! No need to be afraid. I am the angel Gabriel, and I have great news for you!

“No really, let me finish! You are going to have a baby! Congratulations! And here is the best part: the father is going to be ... God!

“And this child will be amazing! He is going to love absolutely everyone.

“And, then, when he grows up, they will even have a parade for him in Jerusalem!

“And well, that is going to make the Romans really nervous, but you don’t need all the details about that.

“What do you say, Hannah? You’re too busy? REALLY?”

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“Greetings, Mary! No need to be afraid. I am the angel Gabriel, and I have great news! You have found favor with God. You are going to have a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the son of the most high, and God will give 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.

“I know this seems unlikely, since you are not married, but the Holy Spirit will take care of all that.”

“And when he grows up ... You will? Really? I thought I would have to tell you more! Oh, thank you!”

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Mary said yes. She didn’t kick the angel out. She didn’t say she was too young, or she had other plans, or she was too busy. Mary said yes, knowing that she would have to have a difficult conversation with her fiancé Joseph and with his mother as well. Can you imagine those talks?

Mary said yes to all the joys of motherhood – the sweet smiles, the mornings of watching her child grow.

She also said yes to the unforeseen but inevitable heartbreak of raising a child – one you cannot protect from the hurts of the world.

Mary may not have been the first woman the angel Gabriel came to, according to this tradition. But she was the one who said yes. Mary said yes to God who wanted to live in and through her. Yes, to life and death and resurrection.

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Greetings, Center Harbor Congregational Church! No need to be afraid. I have great news! The Spirit of the Living God is being born again in you.

And it will be amazing! You will love absolutely everyone. You will know them all as children of God, just like yourself.

And you may find yourselves eating meals with people you wouldn’t expect, just like Jesus did. But do not be afraid. Those are children of God as well.

And there will be times of joy and times of sorrow, and still, it will be wonderful, because this is the journey to which God calls us.

This is a genuine offer from the Creator of Heaven and Earth, and God doesn’t impose it on us. God waits for our answer. Will we, like Mary, say yes?

Amen