

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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Last week you may remember Mary was singing a song of praise to God about what God was doing in her and the world. Well, This week, we find her at quite a different place, we find her BEFORE those rebelliously joyous words of the Magnificat even occurred to her.

She has just received a visit from Gabriel, a messenger of God, and before she says “let it be” she is wondering, “**How** can this be?!” She is at the cross section of confusion and fear of what this news means.

Part of her confusion perhaps is that an angel of God was visiting *her* like an angel visited Hagar in the wilderness or Moses at the burning bush- giants of her faith. Why is **she** being greeted in a similar way? She hears mention of the Holy Spirit coming over her-- she may have only known about the holy spirit in connection to the temple and the divine cloud that hovered over it when her ancestors wandered through the desert.

So, she may be wondering, Why are all these divine happenings associated with extraordinary things that happened to extraordinary people happening to HER, *now? She wonders, HOW CAN THIS BE?*

When we reflect on these two moments in Mary’s story, perhaps we’d all like to say as Christians we are ALWAYS able to say “let it be” right away when we face difficult circumstances or don’t quite see where God is working in our lives.

If you're like me, you spend a lot of time looking for God in the extraordinary and when I don't see God there I find myself asking "how can this be?" and I find myself questioning where God is and what God is doing.

Especially during this year- when we've had so many emotional ups and downs- sometimes on the very same day or week- we could find ourselves all over the place. This VERY week, for example, not only did the first people receive the first vaccine approved by the FDA in the US, but we also in this country reached 300k lives taken by Covid. We've reached both our highest and most hopeful moment since the start of this pandemic...and also our lowest.

This is the type of contrast we've had to hold throughout these past 9 months in different ways. And it is NOT easy to see where God is at work. And When someone tells us that God is at work somewhere in the midst of this... we cry out with Mary- "HOW CAN THIS BE?!"

While now we see Mary as quite an extraordinary figure and While it's easy to romanticize Mary, the Mother of God, and especially this moment- this holy annunciation by a messenger of God—Actually, she was an ordinary woman up until this point dealing with some very real and ordinary circumstances.

She was a woman dealing with all the things that a pregnancy brings with it- morning sickness, aching back, swollen feet and ankles.

Womanist Theologian Renita Weems puts it another way and helps us to see Mary as an ordinary woman. Just as we might try to understand our mothers and grandmothers in light of the choices they made in the midst of difficult

circumstances- Renita Weems asks us “to consider the choices Mary makes for herself, in light of the choices available to her.”

There’s a lot the text doesn’t tell us about her process from moving from asking “How can it be?” To proclaiming “let it be” and then singing one of the most beloved praise songs to God in history. We don’t know what kind of circumstances she had to navigate or what kinds of choices she had to make- But Gabriel’s message to her is one that marks her WHOLE story- “God is with you.”

We don’t know all the details, but we DO know that God was *there and then* with Mary, God was **with** her at every moment on her journey. In the joy and praise, AS WELL AS the fear and confusion. And in response, Mary nurtured the life within her so that that the messiah could give life to the world.

Good news in the world:

And just as God was *there and then* with Mary, God is *here and now*. With you and me.

I know it may **not** FEEL like it...because it may not feel like anything extraordinary... but Mary reminds us that God shows up in the most ordinary circumstances of everyday life. Whether it was everyday life 2000 years ago. Or everyday life here in the 21st century. Whether it was an ordinary woman waiting for her son to be born by a manger in a stable. Or you at home listening to a live stream on your couch. Masked up and socially distanced. Waiting for a vaccine, waiting for something new to be born out of all this pain and tragedy we’ve collectively suffered this year.

Our Lutheran tradition would encourage us to lean into believing that God is BOTH with us when we struggle to see God AND on those days when our vision is crystal

clear. Luther would say we are Both sinners And saints, so whether we have good days or bad days- God loves us, has redeemed us and is with us.

And so whether you find yourself asking “How can it be?” Or find yourself saying “let it be”- we too, like Mary, can still be being part of the life-renewing work of God in our world- by nurturing God’s vision of love and justice and peace waiting to be born in every corner of our world today. AMEN.