

18th December 2020

Dear Friends,

Here we are, the week before Christmas in this very strange year, I wonder what your plans are, are you able to see family or friends, or are you like some choosing not to travel and opting for a quieter Christmas celebration. I will see my support bubble family, but will be on my own for Christmas Day, but to be absolutely honest I am looking forward to that! I always find Christmas to be very demanding, with the usual rush of services and events, and then the expectations around the season itself, and while I am not out and about I have led a number of Carol Services online now, and have a few more to go!

One thing that remains, of course, is that no matter how or where we are celebrating or worshipping, the story of God coming in human flesh, in the vulnerability of a baby born into turbulent times remains. God has chosen to be with people, not only in a spiritual way, but in a tangible en-fleshed way, and is embodied in us. Just think about that for a moment. Christ in you, you the hands, feet, eyes and ears of Christ, the heart of God beating within your heart, as you take your place in the body that is the church on earth. I wonder how you respond to that truth. I know it is one that I need reminding of over and over, that God would choose to be not only with humanity but become one with us, so that we can become one with the divine plan and purpose.

Mary's story can be so helpful here, we witness her encounter with the angel Gabriel, hear her questions and then her radical acceptance of being drawn into the divine plan:

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. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.' But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.' Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her. (Luke 1: 26-38)

Mary was perplexed, she had questions, so often we focus on the words "let it be with me according to your word", that we miss the questions, doubts and fears that arose in her heart and mind. Let's face it visiting angels are not common place, and any messages are often preceded by the word's "Don't be afraid!" Mary was afraid, and perplexed, and she had questions. I wonder how long the angel was with her, the account we have is very short, it seems like a minute or two at least, but surely it was longer! Though of course, we don't know. What I am getting at is that it is okay to doubt, to have questions and to seek answers. It seems to me from time to time that the story we are asked to take hold of and live into is just too big, and too overwhelming and that sometimes I have to allow myself to question it, and to ask myself... do I really believe that!?

I can say that I do, I do believe in the virgin birth, though I know many faithful Christian people who don't, and that is okay. I also believe that somehow God became human and dwelt in the physical flesh of Jesus of Nazareth, who has made a way for us to enter into the divine plan by showing us God's face in human form, including the excluded and loving the lost and lonely, and often challenging the religious and political status-quo!

In these difficult days of living through a global pandemic, with news of the rising cases again maybe we have questions, maybe we have unanswered prayers (of so it seems), maybe we are struggling to hang onto hope, and maybe the opposite is true. However you find yourself reacting is okay, let it be, let it be in your prayers, let it be in your thoughts, have grace with yourself, and maybe you will find yourself in a better place.

I leave you with a poem:

*This light
is not mine,
and yet,
if
I dare to emerge
from the shadows
of my doubts and fears,
it will
blaze
through me!
This light
is uncreated
and creative,
it
transforms
my whole being
with gentle
illuminating power...
*
...if I dare
to emerge
from the shadows
to walk
in the way
bathed
in its brilliance*

and a hymn:

*God, make us ready for our celebration,
Praising your Son for his heralded birth.
Glory on high, as the angels proclaimed it,
Peace to all peoples and nations on earth.*

*God, call us now to be part of your purpose,
Seeing your world as you made it to be:
Living your kingdom as Jesus proclaimed it,
Your restoration, where love is the key.*

*God, help us open our hearts to the other,
Feeling the pain of your unequal world.
As in the old times the prophet proclaimed it,
Justice like rivers the sign of your rule*

*God, be our Peace sign, as Christ in the manger;
God, roll down Justice in strength and in power;
God, come Restore us, your Spirit inspiring;
God, be God With Us, Emmanuel, now.*

However you decide to celebrate this year, may you know the God who dwells with and within you, may you know the deep truth that while these are difficult days for the whole world, that one day all will be well. God bless you and keep you, and once again if you would value a chat just let me know.

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