**“A Pregnant Pause”**

December 8, 2024 2nd Sunday in Advent Text: Luke 1:26-38

Reed Baer West Parish of Barnstable

*Pregnant Pause: A pause that gives the impression that it will be followed by something significant.*

Introduction to Scripture

Advent is a season of the church year when we focus on waiting and longing and hoping, as we get ready for our celebrations of the incarnation, of Christmas.

For Luke, the author of the Gospel we will be hearing from today, what is important is that we understand who Jesus was and is, and his meaning for our life. The consummate literary artist, he seeks to persuade us not through a lawyer-like recitation of proofs, but through story-telling. He wants to suck us into the Christ-story, that it might be real for us, that even as our brains might rebel at the impossibility of a virgin birth, our hearts might be warmed by the knowledge that God so loved the world that God not only came near to it, but was born into it by a very ordinary young woman who had the courage to say “Yes.”

So whether you understand the Bible as history, myth, or story, let us listen to Luke’s account of the Annunciation for the meaning it has for you today.

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What a tale Luke weaves. Mary, a young woman engaged to Joseph, but not yet living with him, receives a visit from this heavenly messenger. Mary’s reaction to the angel’s initial greeting is one of puzzlement and fear.

The angel rushes to reassure her that she is, indeed, favored by God, and then, without any sort of preamble at all, continues straight on to the announcement – Mary will conceive and bear a wondrous child, the savior for whom Israel has dreamed for centuries.

Mary plays her cards close to her chest – she’s not saying that this is *not* going to happen, but she has some specific, nuts and bolts questions about *how* this is going to happen: “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” Mary knew a thing or two about miracle births – Sarah giving birth to Isaac in her old age, and Hannah, long unable to conceive, giving birth to the prophet Samuel – but in each of those cases, there were husbands on the scene. Without husbands, we are talking impossible.

But a husband, the angel tells her, is not the answer here. What he is talking about is something totally out of both their experiences, and so it must be totally incomprehensible to Mary – as it is, indeed, for me. The angel says, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.” What, Mary must have wondered – as we do today – does *that* mean? Mary signals her lack of comprehension by remaining silent.

And so the angel continues to press the case, and pulls in the only piece of hard evidence he can muster, fragile as it may be – “Remember your cousin Elizabeth, the one who was thought to be unable to bear children and is now too old for such things – well she is pregnant, and God’s behind that as well.”

But you can almost hear the wheels turning upstairs for Mary – “Hey, that Elizabeth story is no help to me here at all – she, after all, has a husband, even if she is a bit long in the tooth. Why can’t this angel, if this story is to be believed, come up with anything better than that? And besides, who I am, a poor peasant girl, to be chosen for such a task? This whole thing sounds impossible to me.” The wheels may be turning, but still, Mary remains silent.

And so the angel fires his last arrow, perhaps aware that his meager rational proofs and explanations just are not cutting it here: “For nothing will be impossible with God,” he says. And then, having done his best, this messenger, in that holy silence, waits.

And so do we. We wait.

We are not so unlike Mary. We run up against the impossible all the time, when our dreams for a better life, a better community, a better world, a better church, seem so far out of reach. The impossible dream is always something that is far beyond our puny grasp, far beyond anything we might dare to hope we could affect. The forces that oppose us are so great, the *status quo* is so entrenched, the powers of evil so daunting – what can we do?

As individuals we face impossible dreams: forgiving a former spouse who deserted us; at a time where new openings are scarce, overcoming the despair of being laid off once again;

facing another day of medical tests and procedures and medications; finding joy in life when a beloved family member has died; climbing out of the rut which has been home for so long it is hard to remember that there are alternatives.

As a community, local, national, and international, we face impossible dreams: reversing or at least slowing the pace of global warming, which if left unchecked will in a generation or two put our Cape under water, while still seeking answers to energy needs; funding pre-school education for our children while not crippling the already heavily-taxed people of this Commonwealth; granting relief to oppressed and persecuted families fleeing intolerable conditions in their native lands while at the same time tackling the problem of protecting our borders; standing up to Russian expansionism in Europe while ensuring national security.

As a church we face impossible dreams: in a time of when church is no longer the go-to option for people, when young parents grew up unchurched and have so many demands on their time, when the stream of new retirees to the Cape seeking a church home has dwindled to a trickle, we struggle to fill slots on boards and committees, to balance the budget, to be the church we long it be.

The dreams which rise up before us, as individuals, as members of this community, as people of God in this church, are so great, and we are so puny, so little, so few. For us, these seem to be impossible dreams.

And yet, the dreams are there, the visions of healing and wholeness and new life which God announces to us will not go away, and they will not let us rest.

The angel waits, and we wait, and Mary – Mary pauses.

It is a pregnant pause, pun intended – a pregnant pause being a pause that gives the impression that it will be followed by something significant. In this case, something momentous, something that will change the world. But first, there is the pause.

What if we, here, in our time, paused as well?

We are really good at *doing*, and we have been doing non-stop now for a long time.

As a church, we are coming off a season of frantic preparations for the church fair, the big day itself, the clean-up just completed this past week; this past year we undertook a successful search for a new music director, one whom we trust will revive our music programs, and then undertook another search for a new Family School Director, who brings new energy and vision to the task; the Foundation had its annual meeting and has been rushing to complete repairs to the bell tower and landscaping before the winter arrives.

As individuals and families we have been going flat-out as well, preparing for and celebrating Thanksgiving, making it through Black Friday and Cyber Monday and Giving Tuesday, and now beginning all the preparations for the holiday season, the decorating, the planning, the gift buying and wrapping, the cooking, the parties, the holiday performances, and so on.

Amid all this doing, what if we took a cue from Mary, and just slowed down a bit, and took a pause? An intentional time out. A moment to simply take a breath, turn off the cell phone, close our eyes, and lean back into God’s everlasting arms. A pregnant pause, because it will be a pause which gives the impression that it will be followed by something significant, something momentous.

We can do that, because as the angel assures Mary, “Nothing is impossible with God.”

Mary paused, and with a “Yes!” changed the world. May we take that same pause, and may we echo that “Yes!” as well. Amen.

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