

LIVING AND CELEBRATING ADVENT – WEEK 4

Spiritual surrender is the act of turning your will over to God.



Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord;
let it be to me according to Your word.

Luke 1:38

PRESENCE OF GOD

From ancient times, God has assured people in the bible of His presence by saying, "I am with you." God was with Abraham, Moses, Paul, and Jesus has promised to be with us always (Matthew 28:20). During this fourth week of Advent, we prepare to celebrate the feast of Christmas – the birth of Emmanuel, which means 'God is with us. May we continue to be aware of His presence in our hearts and in the hearts of all people of good will.

PSALM 80/85

Refrain:

Lord, make us turn to You; show us Your face and we shall be saved.

Shepherd of Israel, hearken from Your throne and shine forth,
O rouse Your power and come to save us. (REFRAIN)

You are the Chosen Vine, only by Your care do we live,
Reach out Your hand to us, O Lord. (REFRAIN)

If You dwell with us, we shall live anew in Your love,
O shine upon us, Great Lord of Life. (REFRAIN)

See, Lord, we look to You for You alone can bring us to life,
O walk before us to light our pathways. (REFRAIN)

O God of Wisdom, come and teach us to live in Your ways.

O Adonai and Leader, come and free us.

O Root of Jesse, come to free us and do not make us wait.

O Key of David, come and deliver us from the prisons that hold us.

O Rising Sun, come and light up the darkness of our lives.

O Ruler of all nations, come and free us.

O Emmanuel, come and save us.

In eagerness we await Your coming, Desired One of all peoples.
May we come to realize with Mary that we are Your highly favored ones
and that You desire to be with us.

Increase our faith and put a new spirit in our hearts
that we may bear Your name to the whole world.

LUKE 1:26-38

The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, "Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you." But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

"Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give Him the throne of David his father, and He will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" And the angel said to her in reply, "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 called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God." Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.



REFLECTION

After Gabriel appears to Zechariah, Luke presents the account of his appearance to Mary. And if the angel's news for Zechariah seemed astounding, it was but a trifle compared to the bombshell Gabriel drops on Mary.

"You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."

Whatever upheaval Zechariah had to grapple with was minor league compared to Mary's dilemma. Let's consider her situation when confronted with the news that she would bear God's Son through the virgin birth. What might this mean to her?

Mary was probably about 16, perhaps even younger. She becomes pregnant. Given the societal mores of the time, she could have fully expected that she would be disgraced; that her fiancée Joseph (who knew he wasn't the father) would abandon

her, and that she would probably never marry. It's also important to understand that Jewish society in the first century took a real hard line on "blasphemy," as later accounts of Jesus' ministry and death make clear. A young, single woman claiming that God had made her pregnant would have encountered trouble.

We can try to imagine ourselves in Mary's shoes, but I don't expect we can ever really grasp the enormity of her situation. Mary must have known there could be problems. But rather than focusing on the size of her problems, she chose to trust in the size of her God.

"I am the Lord's servant," she replies. "May it be to me as you have said."

Through the history of Christianity, Jesus' mother has been the subject of a great deal of religious thought, some of it unusual and venturing outside the sparse Biblical accounts of her life. Theologies of Mary have long been one of the criteria Christians have used to differentiate themselves from one another. For Protestants, devotion to Mary is often characterized as a "Catholic thing."

Yet in Luke, Mary offers one of the most powerful examples of a person submitting to God's will, surrendering self and setting aside fears about the future. It is a response that ultimately has little to do with Mary's age, gender or marital status. Mary's example of a life yielded to God's purpose speaks powerfully to us today, its simplicity transcending 2,000 years of complex theology.

God touches our lives often, in ways we almost never expect. We can relate to Zechariah's confusion, but we must aspire to Mary's faith. We need to try, as best we can, to be the Lord's servants, entrusting ourselves to His care as we walk through each new day in His world.

HYMN: COME TO SET US FREE

Come to set us free, come to make us your own.

Come to show the way to our people, your chosen.

Open our lives to the light of your promise.

Come to our hearts with healing, come to our minds with power,
come to us and bring us Your life.

You are Light which shines in darkness, Morning Star which never sets.

Open our eyes which only dimly see, the truth which sets us free. Come...

You are Hope which brings us courage; You are Strength which never fails.

Open our minds to ways we do not know, but where your Spirit grows. Come...

You are Promise of salvation; You are God in human form.

Bring to the world of emptiness and fear the Word we long to hear. Come...

PRAYER OF SURRENDER

Take, O Lord, and receive my entire liberty,
my memory, my understanding
and my whole will.

All that I am and all that I possess You have given me:

I surrender it all to You to be disposed of according to Your will.

Give me only Your love and Your grace; with these I will be rich enough,
and will desire nothing more.

Saint Ignatius of Loyola

Litany for Advent

Response: Come, Lord Jesus! (Revelation 22:20)

In the times when we find it hard to pray,
In the times when we struggle to think of You, dear Lord,
In the times when we are too occupied by business,
In the times when we act so unloving,
In the times when we find it hard to forgive,
In the times when we lack compassion towards our neighbors,
In the times when we don't want to love,
In the times when we do not want to be quiet and listen to You.
In the times we fail to read Your Holy Word,
In the times we fail to worship You especially on the Sabbath,
In the times when we want only to think of ourselves.
In the times when we do not want to get involved in social issues,
In the times when we want to have more material possessions,
In the times when we do not want to examine our consciences,
In the times when we forget You on arising,
In the times when we fail to turn to You during the day,
In the times when we forget You on retiring,
In the times when we put off living as if this day is the last.
In the times when we fail to long for you,



MARIAN PRAYER:

ALL: Loving mother of the Redeemer, gate of heaven, star of the sea, assist your people who have fallen yet strive to rise again.

Holy Mary, mother and companion, in your friendship and care for us, fly to our side and stand close with us. Hear the cries of your sisters and brothers throughout the world. Gently move us all to a courageous faith and help us by your example to surrender our lives to Christ, Jesus, the Word. Amen.

Proclaim to all peoples the glad tidings.
God our Savior is coming to us.

Live Jesus in our hearts.
Forever!

