

Advent Quiet Day -Reflections on the Great Advent Questions The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life

Introduction

Advent is a season of joyful hope and deep longing. Over and over again during Advent we will hear in the scripture readings, the prayers, and the songs we sing as intense longing and hope - an ache - for peace, for reconciliation, and health, healing and wholeness. It is a season when we listen to the words " Prepare the way of the Lord" - for God comes to satisfy the longing of our hearts for belonging, for home and wholeness, peace, joy, and justice - now. Into this tattered and torn world of ours. Into our daily lives, right now.

I'd like to centre our meditations around the passage from Luke about the Annunciation. It is so familiar to all of us that I believe we miss some of God's gifts to us. It contains a very important question within which are three important movements of the spiritual life that will indeed help us to understand our place in bringing the Prince of Peace into our life, our communities and our world.

Listen to the passage - Imagine the angel standing before you, looking at you, calling you by name. Let's hear the story of the Annunciation, and as we listen, try to hear it not as the story we know, but as something totally new. Though the passage uses Mary's name, my name can and does fit in! So does your name! Try it as you hear the passage read - put your name in where Mary's name is mentioned.

Luke 1: 26 - 38

"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 forever, 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 I am, the servant of the Lord, let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her."

Each reflection today will come from part of this reading - I call them the three movements of the spiritual life -

- 1) Will you bring forth the Saviour of the World?
- 2) I am the Servant of the Lord

3) Nothing is impossible with God

First reflection: Will you bring forth the Saviour of the World?

When the angel stood before Mary there is an exchange that contains within it an incredible gift: it is held out as a question. Will you? It is a familiar question for all of us. This time it is also an astonishing question: will you bring forth the Saviour of the world? In this question is the celebration of God's mighty power of love in the life of an ordinary woman - a power that transformed an individual life and the life of the whole world. It is a question to you and to me - not just to Mary ages and long ages ago. God offers us this incredible gift - God wants to celebrate his love in our lives - us ordinary men and women - by offering us the opportunity of this question: will you bring forth the Saviour of the world, today, now - into your life and into the life of the world.

When the angel of the Lord comes to Mary, comes to you and me in our daily lives, with "Greetings favoured one! The Lord is with you." - or another translation of this "Good morning! You're beautiful with God's beauty, beautiful inside and out! God be with you." What happens? If I say to you - good morning - you're beautiful with God's beauty, beautiful inside and out! God be with you - if we greet each other this way ... what happens? This isn't how we think, this isn't what we hear. This is counter cultural! We the favoured ones?! We beautiful with God's beauty inside and out?! The things that come to my mind right away are all the reasons how I can't possibly be favoured, I can't possibly be beautiful. I am not the perfect size, not pretty enough, caring enough, good enough ... the list goes on and on. This is what our culture is telling us every day. How we need to work harder, look like this, have this car If only, if only. Then perhaps we would be successful enough, good enough ... but in one line in this passage from St Luke that is all wiped away. We are favoured - the beautiful one, in whom God is well pleased! We are already there in God's eyes - and God is with us too! Not far off waiting for us to get it right, but here and now. No wonder Mary pondered that greeting. Its not just a simple hello. It is affirmation that we are loved now just as we are! God is with us here and now!

God delights and takes pleasure in me - God delights and takes joy in me. Do I let God take pleasure in me, delight in me, take joy in me? Do I take pleasure in myself? Delight in myself? Take joy in myself?

God delights in you - takes joy in you. Do you let God take pleasure in you, delight in you, take joy in you? Do you take pleasure in yourself? Delight in yourself? Take joy in yourself?

Good morning! You're beautiful with God's beauty, beautiful inside and out! God be with you. Now again, put yourself into this passage. Imagine that the angel was standing before you - telling you that you have found favour with God, and that God wants to use you to bring forth the Saviour of the world. God speaks to each one of us - the Good News of the Gospels are for us and about us. Each one of us is writing our own gospel story - our own good news, born out of the experiences and circumstances of our daily life. God stands before each one of us each day and asks - will you? Will you bring me into your world - your circumstances - your experiences - your relationships, today? Will you bring forth the Saviour of the World, the Prince of Peace - into our tattered and torn world, into our families and our communities.

Advent can be a gift time from God, when you and I can meet that same Angel, who stands before us and tells us that God needs us to bring forth - to give birth to - the Saviour of the World. We have all said YES in our Baptism, do we understand that we said YES ? will we continue to say YES today? ... yes we will give birth to the Saviour of the world, we will be bearers of God, mothers of God ... yes we will bear Christ to the world?

It is a time to reflect upon the hunger for love and for authentic relationship all around us, and in our very own selves. We need to understand our interconnectedness with each other and all of creation - we need each other, more than we could every imagine. Yes - introduces us to a deep sense of belonging and a deep sense of responsibility. It awakens deep within us a yearning - a seeking and also a sense of being found. It is Hildegard of Bingen who said: "Everything that is in the heavens and the earth, and under the earth is penetrated with connectedness, penetrated with relatedness. Japanese gardens at Royal Roads University - in the Fall - there is a tangled tree

Will you bear Christ to the world? This is a time, and this is a question that makes us come to grips with our mutual responsibility, ... It brings back to me our deep longings for each other expressed in that outreach called "Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence in the Body of Christ" ! Will you ... highlights our own brokenness, our own separations, our vulnerability, our own longing to be healed. And all around us, mirrored, are these same circumstances. Into this place comes the question - will you?

What are some of the deep truths of our faith that we bring to God's question? We know that we are God's home. Entering into that home to more clearly know God, to more dearly love God, and to more nearly follow God, day by day, is to stand on holy ground. For God is present, at home in each one of us, and where God is is holy. God longs to come and walk with us in the cool of the evening in the garden, God calls us by our names, that if we are naked, we don't need to be afraid and hide ourselves. God loves us as we are. We know that over all of God's creation, God looked, and was very pleased. Our God is a God of covenants - a God who desires friendship and love with God's people. We are the apple of God's eye, God's very own - the beloved in whom God is well pleased.

We have heard God's voice over and over again in scripture, and the words resonate in our memories, in our heart and soul - *I have called you by name, from the very beginning, you are mine. You are my beloved, on you my favour rests. I have loved you with an everlasting love. I have molded you in the depths of the earth and knitted you together in your mother's womb. I have hold you in the palm of my hand, you are the apple of my eye and I hide you under the shadow of my wings.*

What does it mean to agree to be the person that will bring the Prince of Peace into our daily life?

Angels stand before us every day. I believe that we are surrounded each day by a whole tree full of Angels. Surround by opportunities, circumstances, relationships, pain and need that stand before us and ask "will you bring forth the Saviour of the world into this? Will you bring forth

the kingdom of mercy here? Will you bring forth the kingdom of justice? the kingdom of peace?
the kingdom of love?

Do we notice the angels around us? When was the last time that an angel stood before you?
When did a person, a relationship, a situation or circumstance confront you with the Angel's
message, "God needs you to bring Christ into this place"? How do we answer our angels?

The calling of the church, the calling of every one of us, is to participate with God in the
restoration of unity between ourselves and God, and between ourselves and each other. We are
called to enable alienation, division, and separation give way to inclusion, reconciliation, and unity.
This is often the work of crossing over - of saying yes - to going from the known to the unknown,
from the safe to the dangerous, from the comfortable to the uncomfortable. Saying yes to
bringing Christ to birth is discovering God anew in those who are radically different and in
unexpected places.

Reflection questions:

How is God calling you at the present time to bring forth the Saviour of the World into your own
situation?

What does this mean to you?

Reflect on poverty, homelessness, and suffering. Pinpoint poverty and neediness in the lives of
your family, friends, neighbours, and strangers in your community and in the world. List some of
them.

Imagine God holding all the people of the world in the palm of God's hand - holding all the people
of the world in God's compassionate heart. Imagine fountains of living water flowing into parched
land from God's heart, quenching thirst with God's everlasting and tenacious love. Stay still with
this.

Give thanks for God's tenderness to all people - all of us poor, needy and broken folks. Pray for
more sensitivity to the suffering around us.