

IV Advent

December 21, 2014

Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Stephen's, San Jose

Romans 16:25-27

Luke 1:26-38

Our Gospel reading reminds us that Christmas Day is the launch date for God's eternal plan to drop down into measurable time. This is the plan that changes everything; it changes everybody; and it marks a new era of time. Christmas is when our God moves in and makes Himself known to us with a whole new level of personal relationship.

All of the OT prophecies, all of the prayers by centuries of followers of God, came down to the moment when God sent one of his chief angels to have a talk with Mary. Gabriel told the plan for Jesus to be born to this 14 year old girl. She would bear a son; he would reign over the house of Jacob forever; and there would be no end to his kingdom. And now the whole future of creation hung on her answer. Imagine the angels being gathered around, holding their breath. "What will she say? Will she do it?" They would be anxious for the answer because they knew God's rule of free will; people own their freedom to answer "yes" or "no". There is no coercion, no demand; but freedom to decide whether to go at life on one's own - or to go it with God. Fortunately, that decision can be re-made whenever we decide: we get to choose to go at life with God in the middle of our day – even in the middle of a conversation.

God's plan had led to in this moment; when an angel stood before a girl, answering her questions, trying to keep the anxiety out of his voice, as he and all the heavenly hosts, and even God wait for her answer. Will she do it? Will she say, "Yes"?

We know the answer Mary gave: "Here am I, the servant of the Lord". And with that commitment, she took her place in a long line of witnesses who have been brave enough, or grateful enough, or obedient enough to say to God, "Here am I." She chose to live her life for God; and her decision changed everything.

Today's Epistle reading is the closing of Paul's letter to the church in Rome. Paul is praising God for everything God has done that gives believers the strength to answer 'yes' to the call to faith. Paul says that his preaching, Jesus' life and teaching, and the prophets' writings, all come together to

strengthen you and me to stay firm in our faith. I must add to that list that you and I also help each other through sharing our experiences of faith.

When we find the strength to say, ‘Here I am, the servant of the Lord’, we take our place in a long line of faithful people who have done the same.

I feel encouraged to follow Paul’s example, thanking God for the challenges placed on this congregation through the years – full time rector, parish status, preschool, sponsor Sudanese students, send me to Africa and England, make huge improvements to our facility; tasks that have stretched us, and made us realize that you and I can touch lives beyond these walls; we can make life better for others; we can significantly change people’s lives for good; and we can bring glory to God because we are motivated by our faith to do things we could NEVER do individually.

Even though you may have never thought about what God has planned for you, that doesn’t mean that God hasn’t been preparing you to do it. God gives each of us the skills and the opportunities, and then patiently waits to hear us say, “Here I am, the servant of the Lord.”

The angels hold their breath for our answer when God puts an opportunity in our path. And we can know that they are shouting, “Alleluia!” when we say “yes” to living our life for God.

I pray that we see the humble faith of Mary as a model for our own life;
that we are able to recognize and value
the opportunities God keeps giving us
individually and as a faith community;
I pray that we use our gifts and talents faithfully;
I pray that God will strengthen us every new day
to make the commitment Mary made;
“Here am I, the servant of the Lord:
Let it be with me according to your word.”
Amen.