

Something's Coming Luke 1:26-38 December 16, 2007

Rev. Joyce Kirk-Moore San Dimas Community Church, United Church of Christ

These words from Becky's poem: *The beat of his heart surprised me....*, and Jim's hymn *Love Song*, and Mary's encounter with Gabriel reveal to us in the language of the heart the poignancy of this mother and child relationship. These are words of flesh and bones and human emotion and spirit. Years ago I found a greeting card which I'm saving for our girls if they become mothers which says: *Motherhood is to decide forever to have your heart go walking around outside your body.* (Elizabeth Stone)

We learned in Wednesday evening Bible study the intriguing parallels between Luke's verses addressed to Mary announcing Jesus' birth and the angel's visitation to Zechariah just a few verses earlier announcing the birth of John. Here are some of the parallels:

After years of being barren, Elizabeth will conceive.

Mary will have a son although she is not married.

The angel appears to Zechariah.

The angel appears to Mary.

The angels says to Zechariah: Your wife will bear a son.

*and to Mary: **You shall bear a son.***

You shall call him John.

The angel says to Mary, You shall call him Jesus.

He shall be great before the Lord.

He shall be Great.

Zechariah asks: How shall I know?

Mary asks: How shall this be?

Angel answers Zechariah: I have been sent to announce this to you.

Angel answers Mary: The holy Spirit will come upon you.

Zechariah is rendered speechless.

Mary answers: Here am I, the servant of the Lord. Let it be with me according to your word.

You see, when Luke was written in about 85 A.D. Christianity was still a rather new movement. There were very likely followers of John the Baptist still meeting and forming communities, and one of Luke's points is to contrast John and Jesus. John was great; but Jesus is greater.

And another contrast is being made by Luke which only the hearers living in that time and place under the Roman occupation of Caesar Augustus might easily notice. Caesar Augustus was said to have a divine birth; he was called the divine one, god made manifest, lord and savior of the world. Luke, by writing his account of Jesus' birth, is in the face of Rome saying "Not on your life!" Luke's words are treason because they say "NO" to Caesar and "YES" to Jesus as God's true representative, God incarnate, God come to earth. The birth narrative becomes a great counter-cultural statement by one of Jesus' disciples.

But let's get back to Mary. I've always been deeply moved with her response to Gabriel: ***Here am I, the servant of the Lord. Let it be with me according to your word.*** Mary is a teenage unwed mother. Rather than resist her role, she gives her whole self, all that she is to the birthing of the coming Holy One. Hear again some of Becky's poem is so moving: *I was surprised by quiet breaths, unaware of the words they would carry, I could not have expected what he would become, the words those lips would carry to all people, to all times. What have I*

become? A wonder? A vessel for all people, for all times? I am body and blood and yet I wonder at this vessel that surrounded God. I am body and blood and I have brought life, I have surrounded God--

Would **WE**, could **We** be so willing to give ourselves to such a calling? And think of Joseph who also plays his role in accepting this unwed mother as his wife along with the shame put upon her by others. Would **We, are we** willing to accept the whispers, the gossip, the shunning from others in order to be true to God's calling for our lives? This is today's advent question posed to each of us.

Today we are asked to give birth to the God inside of us, to be surprised by the calling of the Holy Spirit to be born in perhaps new and surprising, perhaps embarrassing and risky, maybe life shattering or at the very least life transforming ways. Giving birth is glorious and miraculous, but also risky and sometimes even fearful. Yet, humans yearn to give birth to something new and innocent, someone with possibilities in whom we simply must place our hopes and dreams for all the years to come.

Something's coming. In today's text Mary has not yet conceived. She's just told that she will. Sometimes conception and pregnancy even before giving birth is a time of trepidation as well as joy. I couldn't conceive for four years. It's awful to endure setting in the doctor's waiting room surrounded by women in various stages of their pregnancies and feeling barren. After two surgeries and when I least expected it, I was *surprised by the beat of her heart*.

Then when I was seven months pregnant my two best friends, one 8 1/2 months pregnant, the other six, gave birth to baby boys who both died within a few hours. I was devastated and couldn't help but feel my child might have the same fate. And yet, Brittany was born tiny but strong. My friends later adopted beautiful children. "Motherhood [and fatherhood] is to decide forever to have your heart go walking around outside your body." (Elizabeth Stone) Years later Tom and I were married. The following summer I had a miscarriage. After several more years of trying to have a child, we decided to love the lives before us and to give birth to possibilities for life in our world in other ways.

Being true, being faithful beckons us to say like Mary: "Here am I, the servant of the Lord. Let it be with me according to your word" whatever that word may be.

Yet whether or not we give birth to children, we humans give birth to life! Something's coming! Our lives work is to usher in possibilities yet to be revealed. Someone's coming! We watch with wonder as life unfolds before us, and we are face to face with God's call on our lives that **WE** are vessels to bring forth the glory of God into this world. Something is coming!

And so Advent confronts us with the question of what we are going to do about it. Will we retreat from the life before us? Will we seek safety in obscurity and the ordinary? Or will we say **Yes** to the extraordinary Spirit of God that seeks to find vessels who are willing to birth the Spirit of God into **This** world, today's world. Today we light the candle of joy. It is not a joy that is absent of pain. It is joy born from faithfulness, courage, and truth.

Will we allow our hearts to go walking around outside our bodies so that our hearts can touch the great longings and pain of the world. Will we have the courage and strength, in spite of our weaknesses and vulnerabilities, to say, like Mary: ***Here am I, the servant of the Lord. Let it be with me according to your word.***

May it be so!