

Advent 4

Matthew 1: 18-25

We're just days from Christmas and this is an opportunity to think on Mary's 'yes' to God. It was Mary who with Joseph co-operated with God to enable **the light** to be brought to birth. But I want to ask how did it happen? We know the story so well, it's easy to push down our questions and wonderings.

Early in Advent I said to my spiritual director, I don't feel ready for Advent. Her response was well I wonder how ready Mary and Joseph felt during the first Advent. I know some of you like to keep politics and religion separate, but Mary Joseph had no such luxury. Theirs was a journey undertaken because of a political imperative. Imperial Rome wanted to count its subject citizens. So Mary and Joseph were forced to make long and uncertain journey when birth was immanent. I wonder how they felt. How did they cope with birthing a baby in a stable or was it a cave? There is conjecture.

Looking at rustic nativity scenes it's easy to sentimentalize the scene. Was it all beatific? It is not always easy to disentangle Mary from doctrinal ideas and the devoted adoring artists. For ordinary folk like me it can be hard to see Mary as an attainable role model. Here is what poet Ann Lewin has to say.

You always appear
Too good to be true, Mary.
We've pictured you always serene,
Never exasperated by a fractious child,
Apparently having no feelings.
But surely that initial Yes came

from a moment of overwhelming terror?

And the birth tore you to the core?

Did he never cry that baby,

Give you sleepless nights?

Didn't he irritate you,

That precious son

Dismissing your anxiety with

Didn't you know?

And later that wounding question,

Who is my mother?

My mother would have told him...

Perhaps you did too,

But it wasn't recorded.

Even at the end you're pictured

Beautiful in your sorrow,

Holding your dead child.

Not like those ravaged faces

We see on our screens

Raging at senseless

Killing of the innocent.

(Get Real, from Watching for the Kingfisher)

As hard as it may be for us to imagine, Mary was the agent of the New Thing that God was doing. The promises of Isaiah were (43: 19)

being fulfilled. God's promises had long been delayed because of people were unwilling to co-operate with him and live by his laws. But Mary's 'Yes' was the beginning of the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

If we think only on Mary as a meek virgin (which can be translated as young woman) we don't do her justice. Her Magnificat (Luke 1: 46-55) revealed a feisty woman with a real concern for social justice. Another Lewin poem:

It was not the first time
You had been waiting, wondering.
This time there was quickening of senses,
Certainty that you would give birth.
A flash of insight, filling you with terror,
How could this be?

This disconcerting messenger insisted
what you would bear was gift of God.
No need to wonder how,
The gift you needed was already in you,
Slowly maturing to the point of birth.

No one told you then how birth is painful
creation tearing you to the core.
That would come later.

For the present

All that is needed is your 'Yes'.

(Annunciation from Watching for the Kingfisher)

Are you shocked by any of the words used here? I have to admit they sound somewhat disrespectful probably because we put Jesus' birth into a rarefied category so perhaps it's only poetry that can ground the event in earthy existence.

Mary's yes reminds us that God needs our yes so that we can become his co-creators, midwives for the Kingdom of God.

When we pray to offer ourselves to God's service, we are offering to put our energy into making the kingdom a reality. For this to happen many hearts will need to change. We are not always keen to change so when we say 'yes' to God, we may need to ask to manage change rather than being overwhelmed by it. We may even be called to become more involved in our community and to take up a political stance. I am here to tell you that Jesus was a political activist!!¹

At this time of celebration when we reflect on how Joseph and Mary shared in giving birth to the Holy, we might look to what seems to be lifeless within us. What is there that lies beneath the surface in our life that we might bring to life?

Bringing forth the holy isn't only about physical birth. You could think about what creativity you can express with your hands. Some of you may offer to do things in church, hospitality, technology, teaching and guiding. There is another way to think on this and that is

¹ Lewin, A. Come Emmanuel pp28-32

whenever we freely offer ourselves for healing, for joy, for transformation and for peace **we bring forth the holy.**

We also need to remember that birthing can be difficult and dangerous. It takes specialist care and assistance. The great German mystic Meister Eckhart wrote in the Middle Ages calling on folk to become Mothers of God for he said God is always needing to be born. ²

So I wonder how your Advent has been? How do you face this last week of preparation for the mystery of the Incarnation of God born of a woman in a humble stable?

Thanks Be To God.

References

Lewin, A. *Come Emmanuel* Canterbury Press United Kingdom, 2012.

Richardson, J. *Night Visions* Gospeller Press Florida 1998

² Richardson, J Night Visions pp74-75