

## *Theotokos - God Bearers*

Today is the first Sunday of Advent - which is actually New Year's day in the Christian calendar. Yesterday, 13 of us gathered for our Annual Women's Retreat. From 9:30 - 3:30 we reflected on the theme '*Creating The Creche Within*' - which is also the theme we will carry with us through Advent this year. Using the story of the Annunciation of Mary, which Cindy read for us earlier - we sang, reflected, and shared on the meaning of her story for her and for us. What does it mean to create the creche within as we, like Mary, make the journey to Bethlehem. How do we prepare not only our homes and our church - but our hearts - for the birth of God's love into the world once again?

The Annunciation is one of the most beloved scenes in the whole Christian story - an intimate moment between Mary and the angel Gabriel in which everything began with a young girl's 'yes' to God's wild plan. Luke tells us the story in 12 short verses. And Mary seems far more composed than I would be if a messenger from God appeared to me and told me I was going to bear God's child! She didn't even stammer and stutter as I'm sure I would have - if I hadn't dropped into a dead faint first! "*How can this be?*" she asked - and that is all she asked. But there are several other questions I believe I would have asked, such as: Will Joseph stick around? Will my parents still love me? Will my friends stand by me - or will I get dragged into town and stoned for sleeping around? Will there be someone there to help me when my time comes? Will I know what to do? Will I survive his birth? What's going to happen to me?

If such questions occurred to Mary, she didn't ask them - or at least, Luke didn't record them. Luke just tells us that she listened as the angel told her the barest of details about how it would all come to pass - and then came her turn to speak. It was **going** to happen - that much seemed clear - but she still had a choice - whether to say yes or no - whether to take hold of the unknown life that the angel held out to her - or to defend herself against it however she could.

In a sermon on this passage by Barbara Brown Taylor, she remarks that Mary was the only one in the history of the world who had that particular decision to make. The eastern church knows her as '*Theotokos*' - the 'God-bearer' who consented to carry, give birth to, nurse and raise the son of God. Only one person was ever drafted to do that - but still, in Mary's story, we hear something of our own. There is much talk these days about all the choices we have - and about how it is up to each one of us to choose our own lives - but more often than not they seem to choose us. You may recall the phrase "Life is what happens when you've made other plans" - and it is so true, isn't it?! Our best laid plans are often interrupted by life's own plans for us: by sudden illness, and surprise babies, by aging parents and the economy. Terrible things happen and wonderful things happen - but seldom do we know ahead of time exactly **what** will happen to us. Like Mary, our choices often boil down to yes or no - yes, I will live this life that is being held out to me - or no, I will not. Yes, I will explore this unexpected turn of events - or no, I will not.

If you decide to say 'no' - you simply drop your eyes and refuse to look up until you know the angel has left the room - and then you try to pretend that nothing has happened. And if that doesn't work - you can get angry or defensive or resentful - and spend a lot of energy trying to get your life back the way it used to be - usually with little result.

Or you can decide to say yes - to make the best of it, to explore the adventure of it, to ride the waves of it and see where it will take you. You can decide to take part in a plan that you did not choose - but choose you - with no script and no guarantees. Deciding to say 'yes' doesn't mean that you are not afraid - it just means that you are not willing to let fear control your life. So you say 'yes'

to the angel, like Mary did: "Here I am; let it be with me according to your word." - and in so doing, become one of Mary's people - one more 'theotokos' who is willing to bear God into the world. You willingly open your life so that God's dreams, God's plans, God's love can grow inside you and be birthed to the world.

As we begin our Advent journey once again by entering into Mary's story, I'd like to close with a quote that I shared with the women yesterday from Meister Eckhart - a medieval theologian and mystic. He says, "*We are all meant to be mothers of God. What good is it to me if this eternal birth of the divine Son takes place unceasingly - but does not take place within myself? And, what good is it to me if Mary is full of grace if I am not also full of grace? What good is it to me for the Creator to give birth to his son, if I do not also give birth to him in my time and my culture? This, then, is the fulness of time: When the Son of God is begotten in us.*"

Creating the creche within isn't only about getting ready for Christmas. It is saying 'yes' to whatever it is that God wishes to give birth in us. It is being attentive to God's messengers - however and wherever they may be found in these days. It is choosing to open our lives up to the daring and risky adventure of God's wild dreamings. It is joining with Mary in being a theotokos - a God-bearer for our world.

Greetings, favoured ones! The Lord is with you. Do not be afraid. For nothing is impossible with God!