

## **MAKING ROOM FOR GOD TO SURPRISE US**

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I went online and Googled annunciation images and found thousands of images. This prompted me to stop and see what image was in my mind as I read the story of the Angel Gabriel announces to Mary that she would bear Jesus.

Stop for a moment and think about what this scene looks like in your imagination. Each portrayal says something about our impression of the Virgin Mary. Close your eyes and listen again. What is the scene like, the room, is it daylight or night time? How do the two characters interact with each other. Is Mary kneeling looking up at the angel in awe and wonder? Is she cowering with fear? Is she looking nervously at Gabriel? Is Gabriel kneeling before Mary as if she is the one with the power? Are they just two friends having a talk?

Take a moment and tell the person next to you what your image is. What does this say about your image of the Virgin Mary? Remember there is no such thing as a right or wrong answer here.

Allow time for a little discussion and then report back.

The one word that comes to my mind and so that is the word of the week is SURPRISE. No matter what the setting looks like this is about making room for God in our lives and allowing ourselves to be surprised by God.

God often surprises us when we are open and willing to be surprised. David in today's Hebrew Scriptures is convinced that it is time to build the temple, but the prophet Nathan tells him, no this is not the time. God does not want to be restricted by human efforts to put God in a temple safe and secure where we can visit God only when we want to. God is too big for that kind of limitation. God is limitless, but we put limits on our interactions with God.

Mary on the other hand has an incredible faith that allows her to accept the surprise that God has in store for her. There is no attempt to limit God in Mary's answer.

Mary is favored by God, but what do we usually consider signs of God's favor? Success, rewards, a good life with little struggle. Yet this is not how Mary is favored. This story is so familiar that we often miss this scandalous fact. God's favor results in pain and challenge. This is why many people would get very worried if an angel appeared and said, "Do not be afraid you are favored by God." Talk about a gee thanks, maybe I'll pass on that moment.

Some thoughts from Richard Rohr might be very helpful here. This was in one of his daily meditations during this Advent period:

Of all the books in the New Testament, the Gospel According to Luke gives the fullest account of Mary both as mother of Jesus and as symbol of humanity.

She is revealed in Luke as a real mother, completely human. No plaster statue or artist's Madonna, she is a Jewish girl who grows to womanhood in the company of a son who is as much a mystery to her as a child can be, and perhaps lost her husband early, since Joseph disappears from the text. That's very real, as any mother or widow today can also testify.

Yet Mary is a woman of extraordinary faith, which is what sets her apart and makes her a model for the rest of us. Even though she does not fully understand what God is asking of her, she believes with all her heart that it can and will be done, and she acts accordingly. Amazing that we turned faith around to mean having answers for everything. Mary did not seem to have answers for anything. She just "held all these things in her heart" ([Luke 2:19, 51](#)) until they eventually revealed their meaning.

This is a very different definition of faith and one that I find very helpful. This is not a faith that requires all the answers before moving forward into that leap of faith. This is a faith that above all else trusts God. This is a faith that says God is in charge not me. I find that very reassuring right now in a turbulent world.

Martin Smith gave a lecture many years ago where he talked about being a co-creator with God. He speaks of allowing God to be a partner in our lives and having the faith to allow God to take the lead. Mary is just such a Co Creator with God. God is all powerful, but for this act he needs a real person. For the kingdom to come on earth God needs real people. God needs, real people, ordinary people who are extraordinary enough to have the faith to make room for God in their lives. People who are willing to take the risk to say, let it be so with me. People who are willing to be surprised by God.

Now I have not given you my impression of this seen or what might have been going on in Mary's mind. However I think Thomas Merton may offer us an insight. It is a prayer that I have used before and continue to use with the vestry and our Vision Team. This could be the prayer for our parish that guides us into the future.

### **My Lord God,**

I have no idea where I am going.

I do not see the road ahead of me.

I cannot know for certain where it will end.

Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that

I think that I am following your will  
does not mean that I am actually doing so.  
But I believe that the desire to please you  
does in fact please you.

And I hope I have that desire  
in all that I am doing.

I hope that I will never do anything  
apart from that desire.

And I know that if I do this  
you will lead me by the right road  
though I may know nothing about it.

Therefore will I trust you always  
though I may seem to be lost  
and in the shadow of death.

I will not fear,  
for you are ever with me,  
and you will never leave me  
to face my perils alone.

Thomas Merton