

4 Advent
December 22, 2024
Advent 4, Year C

Sermon by Rev. Jim Dannals

The real miracle is not virgin birth. The real miracle is that Mary said "Yes." These are the thoughts of Martin Luther 500 years ago...

Have you ever wondered how many times God offered the invitation before it was given to Mary? While none of us knows, it is patently clear, and for a variety of reasons, that all of the men said "No."

Bob and I met in the summer of 1978. I had one year left at Yale Divinity School and Bob, who was the Presbyterian Chaplain at Auburn University, had just moved to New Haven for a year of study leave. We immediately became friends, at least partly because his infant son, Aaron, had been born on May 21st and my infant son, Matthew, had been born on May 23rd.

Both of our spouses worked outside the home and we both had to go to class and study. So, we created a partnership. We took turns watching each other's infant sons while the other one of us studied. Whoever was on duty would have his child in the Snuggly on his chest while pushing his friend's son in a stroller. I dare say that no two infant boys have ever been on more walks and/or longer walks than Aaron and Matt.

One day, when Bob was on duty, a few blocks away from our apartments in married student housing, a woman in the neighborhood stopped Bob and the boys... just to marvel at the children... "Are they twins?" she asked Bob.
"No Ma'am, they were born two days apart."

As she stared at the boys in amazement with a puzzled look, Bob said: "Different mothers."

And Bob loved telling the story of his coming home from work one night as a college chaplain and, when his wife, Marla, asked him how his day was, he said: "Terrible, I didn't get a darn thing done all day. The students just kept interrupting me, one after the other." Now Marla was, and is, a very wise person - so she simply listened. But an hour or two later, after they had finished dinner, she asked Bob if he remembered what he had said when he walked in the door from work. Well, of course he did not remember and so she refreshed his memory. Bob then said, "And?" - to which Marla replied: "I think those interruptions are your work!"

Mary's interruption was a child – and a child is synonymous with interruption. Lauren Winner suggests that the good tidings Gabriel brings are tidings of a lifetime of interruptions...

Mary responds to the news of this interruption, “How can this be? How can this be? Let it be... My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord... my spirit rejoices in God my Savior... Mercy flows on those who are in awe. God scatters the proud in the thoughts of their hearts, brings down the powerful, lifts up the lowly, fills the hungry with good things, sends the rich away empty.”

Have you ever wondered what you would have said if you were in Mary’s shoes? Our lives are full of interruptions. Where is your life being interrupted? Is it possible that the interruption is from God?

Each year, this is the day when we give thanks for the interruption that came to Mary... this is the day that we give thanks that Mary trusted the angel, that somehow, some way, Mary knew this wild and crazy interruption was from God. What a 9 months it must have been... Surely there must have been second thoughts and times of darkness and despair. But the same Spirit who created new life within her helped her to embrace the interruption as a loving gift of God, a gift of new possibilities – the possibility of becoming co-creator with God.

Is your life interruption just such a possibility?

In the New Zealand Prayer Book, Night Prayer or Compline ends in this way:

Lord, it is night. The night is for stillness. Let us be still in the presence of God.

It is night after a long day. What has been done has been done; what has not been done has not been done; let it be.

The night is dark. Let our fears of the darkness of the world and of our own lives rest in you.

The night is quiet. Let the quietness of your peace enfold us, all dear to us, & all who have no peace.

The night heralds the dawn. Let us look expectantly to a new day, new joys, new possibilities.