

**Advent 4b, 2 Samuel 7:1-11-16; Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26; Romans 16:25-27;
Luke 1:26-38**

Ride along with me on a summer vacation trip. Think back to the time of your youth, maybe around twelve years old. You are headed to the beach with your family and there is excitement as the car is packed. The family is rushing around making sure that nothing has been forgotten, although everyone knows that something has been overlooked. The windows to the house are closed, the front door is locked, and everyone is sure that the stove and iron have been turned off. One last stop at the gas station to fill the tank, and the family is finally on its way. Everyone has been looking forward to this time away ever since you returned from vacation last year. The trip is hot and long and there is a time when you think that you will never get there. But then, there it is: the first hint that you are arriving at the beach is the smell. It is that wonderful smell of salt, sea, and sand. You remember that

smell, and you smile, close your eyes, and breath in as hard you can. You can see the waves breaking in your closed eyelids. You can feel the cool water around you as a wave crashes into you. It is that wonderful feeling of joyful expectation. You are so excited that you do not know what to do: you almost wish the car would stop and you could run the rest of the way. And probably your parents would be just as excited to get you out of the car and let you run the rest of the way.

Here we are, standing on the edge. We are at, what is called, thin space. The space between what is created, and what is creator. It is the fourth and last Sunday of Advent. Can you feel the excitement and anticipation in the air with all your senses? You can almost see, smell, taste, hear, and feel the coming of our Lord. I know I told you on the first Sunday of Advent, that Advent is a time of waiting and expectation, and not a time of anxious waiting and anxious expectation. But we are so close now that it is

impossible not to be at least a little anxious. It is beyond our comprehension to think of God saving us by becoming incarnate in a human form to free us from the burden of our consummate sin. God becoming man in the form of Jesus so that man in the form of Jesus Christ can become God. Even though it is beyond our comprehension, the magnitude of the gift is such that we understand that there is no greater gift that could ever be given.

We know that God is coming in the form of a human child because the angel Gabriel tells Mary that that is what is going to happen. God does not break the covenants made with humans. If God sends a messenger to tell humans what will take place, then that is what will take place. God gives a child to a barren Elizabeth earlier in the Gospel of Luke, and tells Mary about it. And the angel who delivers the message to Zechariah that his wife Elizabeth will bare a child does what every wife wishes she could do, shut the man up for doubting. Now, God is doing the impossible again. God is the

father of Mary's child. Mary is the favored one. The child Mary will bear will be holy, he will be called the Son of God. Gabriel tells Mary that nothing is impossible with God. This is truly a moment of shock and awe. The question is, what does one say in response to something like this. Well, after you come back from fainting, and stand up again, you say what Mary said; "here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

Here we are. The Word, capital *W*, and promise of God has been revealed to us. The Son of God is coming. It has been promised to us by God. We should all gasp at the magnitude of what has and is being done for us. And after we compose ourselves again, we should answer like Mary answers; here I am. This is a much repeated phrase throughout the Bible. Abraham says it more than once when God says, *Abraham*. Abraham always answers, here I am.

God calls each of us, and how do we answer? God tells us that the Son of God is coming, and what do we say? The Son of God tells us that the Son of God is coming, and again, what do we say? We make fun of the end-of-the-world predictions made by humans. But when Jesus tells us to be prepared for the day of the coming, we need to take notice, and be prepared for the day of His return. God does not break covenants. If God, through Jesus Christ, tells us that he will come again, then he will come again. And, we will not know the day or the hour, so we must prepare the way of the Lord. We are on the edge of the return. We are at the beginning of a transitory state. The excitement is building. The problem for us is that the transitory state is in God's time, and not human time. Do you remember the Epistle reading from two weeks ago, 2 Peter. "With the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. . . the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise.

. . therefore. . . strive to be found by him [God] at peace, without spot or blemish. and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation.”

We are not the One, but we know, we know that the Lord is coming. We know that the day is getting closer and closer. God loves us so much, that God sends his only Son to us. The miracle of the gift that could only be given by God. The miracle of the gift that is life from God, human death, and life again through Christ.

“The gift that God would enter human life with all its depravity, violence, and corruption.” The gift that the annunciation to Mary is a gift of hope for all of humankind. The gift that “God has not abandoned us to the consequences of our own sinfulness. . . God has sent Jesus as our deliverer. . .” a life “under Jesus’ Lordship that is without end.”¹

This gift from God can only be answered by all of us with the words

of the blessed Virgin Mary in the Gospel of Luke, “here I am, let it be with me according to your word.” Let all of us “prepare the way of the Lord.”

Let all of us as the body of Christ, the church, work as one to “make straight in the desert a highway for our God.” (Isaiah 40:3) “. . . God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever!” (Romans 16:27)

¹ Culpepper, Alan R., *The New Interpreter's Bible, A commentary in Twelve Volumes*. Volume IX. Abingdon Press; Nashville. 1995. p53. The entire paragraph is quoted or paraphrased from this source.