

**Sunday, December 13, 2020**  
**Sermon: How to Birth God into the World**  
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**Clackamas United Church of Christ**

Friends, this is the third week of Advent. I don't know if I've told you what Advent is all about, so we're three weeks into it and I'll tell you now. Advent comes from the Latin word "adventist" which means "arrival." It is waiting for the arrival of an important figure and Christians wait for the arrival of Jesus at Christmas. Back in the first century, you might be interested to know that Advent was not particularly for Jesus. You weren't expecting Jesus to come if you were in the Roman Empire. You were expecting the emperor to come. You were expecting the advent of the emperor to come into your town and there would be a celebration. Why? Because if you didn't celebrate the emperor coming in, it would be bad news for you. If you had a protest of the emperor it would not go well for you and your town. You would find yourself at the other end of a sword. Christians bring forth a different kind of Advent. It's an Advent that waits in the coming of the Christ child to be born at Christmas. But also it waits for what's generally called the "second coming" of Jesus.

Now, there's a whole lot of baggage with "second coming" language within Christianity and I want to invite you to put that baggage to the side for a moment because what Advent does is realistically look at the world, how things are broken, how they're not, how they are supposed to be. Advent says we're going to wait for God to come and fix it. This is good news in one sense because it's hope. It's the hope of Jesus coming back and setting things right because so often we mess things up. But don't think of Advent as a passive waiting for God merely to come and make things right while we just sit back and wait for God. That's not what Advent is about. Advent is about actively participating with the God who is already here among us. Why do I say that? Because of our story today with this wonderful experience that Mary has. The Angel, Gabriel, comes to Mary and says to her you are blessed, you have found favor with God and God has a plan for you to help bring joy and justice and love into the world. You notice how Mary does not respond. Mary was probably about 14 years old. This 14-year-old does not say "I don't think so Angel Gabriel because I'm old enough to know that the world is just messed up and there's nothing we can do about it and we just have to wait for God to hurry up and fix things for us." No, Mary says she's on board, let's do this.

Mary, maybe it's because she's so young, has what our Jewish friends call "chutzpah." Mary has this fire under her and she says to God, "I'm in on the plan with you." And then Mary births love into the world. Mary participates with God in bringing love into the world through this baby, Jesus. And so, that's what Advent is about. It's about us saying yes to God, just like Mary said yes to God. The miracle of birthing love into the world is something we can all participate in. And I want you to notice something about Mary, too, not just that she's young but also that the story says that she found favor with God. This word "favor" is so important because we generally think of finding favor with God, maybe you've been told this in your religious life, that you find favor with God by believing the right things or doing the right things. That's not what this is about. This favor with God that Mary has isn't based on anything that Mary has done.

You read the story and Mary is precisely not chosen because she's important. She's not important. She's a poor, average, Jewish girl and this is exactly why the Angel Gabriel comes to her and says, "I have a mission for you." Because the mission of God is not just for powerful people, not just for important people, it's for people like you and me, people who are average and below average. It's for all of us. Those categories of average, above average, and below average, mean nothing to God. Because God loves you and has a mission for you. God has found favor in you, not because of anything you have done, not because of anything you have left undone, but because God loves you. The word "favor" is the word *evnea*. *Evnea* is translated as "favor" but it's also translated as grace, unmerited, undeserved, grace.

Mary found undeserved, unmerited, grace with God and she said yes to that unmerited, undeserved, grace. Why is that important? Because we live in a world that says that you are only important if you believe in the right things, if you do the right things, if you have a certain amount of money, if you have the right job. That's when you know you are important and you have "made it." The gospel story is not that story. The gospel story is that you are loved, you are favored because you exist. Or as we heard from Jean's prayer earlier about her daughter's dog, because you exist. It's not just humans, it's dogs, it's animals, it's nature, it's that all things are favored because God is a God of favoring, of unmerited love that embraces you and me and all of creation. That's the first part and maybe the most important part that we need to let that unmerited love and unmerited grace sink in this Advent season so that we can prepare ourselves for receiving it every day and also for receiving it on Christmas.

But there's more to Mary. Mary and her Magnificat has these audacious subversive words that many churches ignore but we can't ignore them. Mary says that God has shown mercy and she says that God has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly. This is the message that Jesus preaches throughout his life. In the gospel of Luke 2, he flips things around to bring justice to the world. Mary teaches Jesus about God's desire for a more just world where those, as Bill prayed earlier today, for our politicians to care about those who are suffering economically from covid. That's what Mary is talking about here. That's what Jesus talks about throughout his life. Jesus learns this from Mary, that God is about justice and this is not primarily a justice that is about punishing people, this is about justice where God finds favor with everyone. And the just thing to do in response to that is to find favor with one another, is to care for those who are on the margins, to make sure that everybody has enough food, shelter, water, love, not only to survive but to thrive in God's world.

There is enough for all if we open our hearts and minds to one another, if we name the systems of oppression and greed and violence for what they are. They aren't God, they are anti-God. How do we know that? Because Mary has this prayer where the powerful rulers who lead to oppression are brought down and the lowly are lifted up. May we find favor with one another by living into a more just world. May we find favor with one another by sharing God's love with each other. May you know now and forevermore that you are held for all eternity in God's love. Amen