

"LET IT HAPPEN!"

(ADVENT FOUR)

Readings: 2 Sam. 7:1-11, 16, Ps. 89:1-4, 19-26, Romans 16:25-27, Luke 1:26-31, 38.

Preached at First Presbyterian Church, Baldwin, NY on December 18th 2011

As we have been traveling towards Advent a prophet called John the Baptist came out of an unexpected place and foreshadowed the coming of Jesus in unexpected ways. Last week we saw how the 'Wind' of the Holy Spirit was crying out the name of Mary; the poor peasant girl chosen by God to be mother of the Savior.

This week's bible reading gave us an account that's known as the 'Annunciation'. An angel, in fact one who was regarded as a chief amongst angels called Gabriel, addresses Mary with terrifying news (and I use the word terrifying here in the sense that it was news that had such an element of awe within it that the only correct response was to quake with wonder)... "*And behold*" announces Gabriel "*Thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shall call his name JESUS.*"

More details are offered concerning His destiny and identity until, in a moment of beautiful resignation Mary responds, "*Behold, the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.*" Eugene Petersen in the Message pictures it this way "*And Mary said, Yes, I see it all now: I'm the Lord's maid, ready to serve. Let it be with me just as you say.*" Mary says, "**Let it happen!**"

Christmas is coming. Next Sunday will be Christmas Day. It will happen, whether we are ready for it or not. Ready or not, here comes 'What?' Here comes Christmas. And here's Mary saying "**Let it happen!**"

What makes these gentle words of Mary all the more spectacular is that there was a history behind the coming of the Messiah that spanned centuries of prophetic visions and expectations. The child that she was to bear in her womb was not simply one in a number of remarkable events, but this child, the one to be called Jesus, was the climax and the culmination of all that the prophets had hoped and prayed for.

As other biblical writers such as John and Paul would seek to explain, this child was the culmination of God's plans. He was the Creative Word made flesh, the one in whom Creation itself would find its ultimate meaning.

One bible commentator writes; "**Consider this: From the beginning of time God has been at work in bringing forth Jesus Christ so He could be one with His people. Now, in this final annunciation story in the Bible, God's purpose will be fulfilled. God will act to save the people. This child is to be born to this woman for the saving of the world.**"

And here's little Mary saying "**Let it happen!**"

At the heart of Christmas is a startling thought. God wants to do extraordinary things in the midst of our everyday world. As people who are in this world; as every one of us here is a part of the world that God made, the world God saw and God declared ‘*Good*’; the implication of the Incarnation is that God wants to do extraordinary things in our lives. In your life, in my life, in the lives of our families, in the lives of our churches!

So are we ready for a ‘Mary Christmas’? That is are we ready to say to God, as did Mary, “Listen, whatever you want to happen in my life, whatever You have in store for me, however You want to do it... **Let It Happen!**”

If you recall our reading, when the angel first proposes such an idea to Mary, her attitude is not one of acceptance but of perplexity. ‘God; You don’t want to be getting mixed up in a life like mine! I’m not the sort of person who welcomes holy interventions. There’s got to be a catch here, there has to be some kind of miscalculation, can I get back to You on this?’”

When you have the angel Gabriel standing in your front room, telling you not to be afraid and saying that you have found favor with God, it’s a little to late in the day to take a rain check. Some might suggest that ‘**let it happen**’ was the only response that Mary felt she could make!

But to me the really gritty part of this account is this. Mary’s decision to let God do what God wanted to do in her life, meant she would have to abandon her hopes and dreams about how she wanted her life to turn out.

She was a young woman of respectable family who had made a good marriage. She was to be the wife of a skilled craftsman, which would make her a part of the tiny middle-class of Palestine. Her hopes and plans no doubt included a quiet life, children, good health, some economic security, a little comfort, not much pain. God almost certainly had a place in her plans; doubtless she would keep the Commandments, make the sacrifices, follow the rules, pay the tithes and do all the usual stuff.

The story of the Annunciation is God saying "No" to all of Mary's plans. God saying that Mary will have very little of what she had hoped for and expected. God saying that, instead of Mary's plans for herself, God has plans for Mary, and these plans are unexpected, a bit scandalous, and change everything. Saying “**Let it happen**” when it’s obvious that to do so is going to mess with your game plan is tough.

Mary had tremendous faith and courage. It meant standing up to whatever gossip or rejection might come her way because she was pregnant and not yet married. She was willing to suffer a mother’s worst fate, bearing a son who would necessarily be taken from her all too soon.

She was willing to give Him away so the whole world could have Him. Later, she would watch her son walk the rocky road of a religious leader, see her son receive threats and

abuse. Then, Mary would stand at the foot of a cross, helplessly watching Him die a humiliating death.

She would also witness many moments which bore witness to the glory of the Lord and the truth of the angel's announcement. Jesus turning water to wine. Healings and miracles that were hard to put into words. And the greatest miracle of them all, the resurrection.

We no doubt have plans for Christmas and for our families and for our lives. Hopefully those plans include figuring out how God fits in. As Advent comes to an end, we need to realize that God has plans for us. We need to remember that, very often, it has been those times in our lives when things did not go as we had planned that God was the most present, and the most real.

This account of the Annunciation challenges us to give up the absolute authority of our own plans. We are asked to promise to listen, listen in such a manner that we are prepared to let God say "No" to our best plans for ourselves.

Don't get me wrong here! Plans for the future, for our lives and for the direction of our lives are very important. We are to use our freedom responsibly and carefully. And part of doing that is making plans, and making decisions, and following through with them. There is nothing wrong with plans. There was nothing wrong with Mary's plans.

At the same time, Christmas is here to tell us that God's business quite often turns out rather different from "business as usual." The challenge of this last Sunday in Advent is whether we can say to God, "**Let it happen!**" Whether we can truly be open to and accept what God has in store for us, especially when it is not part of our hopes or dreams.

What will Christmas be like for us this year? What would it look like for the Lord to be born and be reborn within us? How do we deal with the reality that God has kept God's promises and come to God's world? Dare we believe that God really does work through ordinary lives like mine and yours and Mary's?

Such a thought may initially fill us with alarm. But by faith, even without an angel in our front room, we will come to see that God's way really is the best way. Not the easiest or the most comfortable, but the deepest and richest, the only way that has eternal benefits and the right way to truly celebrate Christmas.

My prayer for us this morning is simple. "**Let it happen!**"

Work in people's lives in such a way that they see Lord, that Your way is the best way. **Let it happen!**

Lord through Your Holy Spirit work through us as a church here in this place. Help us reach out to the community with Your love, even if it means we have to change the way we do things. **Let it happen!**

Lord help us to reach those who desperately need a touch of heavenly light in the midst of the dark times they are going through. **Let it happen!**

Lord, we know that change has to begin in each of us before it can flow through us to touch others. May new hopes and new dreams be born into our lives as we celebrate the wonder of Christmas.

Let it happen!

Let it happen!

Let it happen!

Amen!

Rev Adrian Pratt