

Advent 4B - 2017

I've long since decided that the annunciation text is one of the most important in all of scripture, for regardless of its "truth," here's the announcement that an ordinary woman living an ordinary life can, by saying "yes" to God and not turning down the opportunity God provides/the call God makes on her, can be part of God's saving work in changing all of creation. The ordinary made extraordinary, the lowly raised up, the power of One working with The One - a thread woven all through all of scripture - hope and grace and love...you name it, I think this story has it.

Men are strangely quiet in Luke's first chapter. Zechariah is silenced. Joseph says nothing at all. What is the gospel writer up to here? In the hush, our gaze is drawn toward two women - cousins who rush to greet each other, females with wombs filled by miraculous cavorting babies, and spirits set afire by the living God. Pure hysteria. I imagine that Plato would have cringed at the rampant emotionalism of it all. And it's just getting started, for after the raucous reunion, after the cousins bump their rounded tummies, the women start to prophesy. They start to talk about how the world ought to be. They make claims about what God wants of us. Their talk is full of typical irrational stuff: you know, tyrants being thrown down; hungry people getting food. They protest social inequalities. They speak of a new order. (by Scott Black Johnston from *Head of Household?*)

Tranquility in the Midst of Turmoil

Two artists were commissioned to paint their conception of peace. A panel of distinguished judges would determine which artist had best captured the idea. The winner would get a rich commission. And after they had been painting for a long time, the judges assembled to view their work. The first artist unveiled his painting, and there was a beautiful, magnificent pastoral scene, with a farmer coming in after a hard day in the fields. His wife was cooking, his children were playing around the hearth, and all was at peace in this tranquil and beautiful farm. "That's it," said the judges, "but we'll look at the other rendering anyway." They removed the veil of the second painting. Instead of a tranquil, pastoral scene, there was a raging waterfall producing a mist, which communicated hostility. But over on the side of the waterfall was a tiny branch of a tree growing out of a rock, and on the end of the branch was a bird's nest. And on the edge of the nest was a mother

bird, singing her heart out in the midst of the turbulence around her. The judges thought for a moment, then said, "This is peace, tranquility and celebration in the midst of turmoil." We need a little Christmas right now, but the little Christmas that we need is the courage that comes as the favor of God. We must remember that the Christian community has done its best when it has gone against the wind. (by William L. Self from *Have I Got News for You!*)