

Zion's UCC of Taborton
Fourth Sunday in Advent
December 24, 2017
Rev. Konrad Raup

Distrusting Angels
1 Samuel 2:1-10, Luke 1: 39-56

The two readings we heard this morning are very similar, are they not? And that's intentional on the part of the author of Luke's Gospel. He wanted his readers to connect Mary's "Magnificat" with Hannah's.

Hannah was the mother of the prophet Samuel. She had feared that she would have no children and she vowed that if she were to have a child, she would dedicate him to God. She had Samuel and when he was a young man, sent him to live and study with the prophet Eli. Eventually, Samuel would become one of Israel's greatest prophets.

Luke is linking Samuel with Jesus to show that Jesus is the next step in building God's reign. The Gospel writers often did that. Jesus became the new Samuel, the new Moses, even the new Adam. The authors wanted to assure their readers that Jesus was not something alien to their tradition, but was a continuation of God's presence among us. Remember, they were all writing from 50 to 100 years after Jesus. There were lots of stories circulating about who and what he was. Many of them were very negative. The Gospel writers were assuring their mostly Jewish readers that Jesus was not a heretic, but firmly within and, more importantly enhancing the tradition.

Okay, enough scripture study. What does all this have to do with us 21st century people? Well, the first lesson that comes to mind is that we are prime targets for God's intervention. Mary was just an ordinary person. She had done nothing in her life that made her especially pious or holy. She was a small town girl with small town aspirations who suddenly found herself thrust into something new and wonderful. Gabriel never said she had to compete for the job. It wasn't a "Galilee's got talent" show. She was the one. Too much Marian tradition in the 19th and 20th centuries have made Mary a demure and subservient person. That's misogynistic baloney. Mary must have been a strong willed and independent person to do what she did. I've sometimes wondered what would have happened if Mary had said: "no way, no how, Gabe! I ain't havin' no baby!" Did God have a backup plan? or was God so clear about this young woman that the thought never came up?

We're just ordinary people too. And God is just as likely to be at work here in Taborton as in New York City or Washington D.C. Hmmm. As I think about it, God is probably much more likely to be in Taborton than in Washington D.C.

That means that you and I have to be prepared to confront an angel. There is no description about what Gabriel looked like. He may not appear in white robes or have feathery wings like the classical artists depict. And God's "blessing" may not be as immediately positive as we might expect. Mary's blessing was to bear an illegitimate child who would be executed as a terrorist. Not on my bucket list. Acceptability, prosperity, and comfort are not necessarily the essence of God's blessing. Being faithful can be challenging.

Barbara Brown Taylor, a modern theologian, says that accepting God's blessing is to open yourself up to new possibilities. If you have the courage to say "yes", then you may find angels on your doorstep again, and again. You may be offered more thrilling and dangerous schemes that have no script and no guarantees. If you say "no", then angels will probably never bother you again. And that would be your great loss.

This congregation will be doing big things in the coming year. I suspect that there will be messenger angels carpooling up the mountain. We need to talk with them. Our futures depend upon what we are willing to accept. There is greatness that can be born out of our willingness to say yes to God's offering.

As the 14th Century mystic, Meister Eckhart said: "We are all meant to be mothers of God. What good is it if Mary is full of grace but we are not? What good is it for us that God Gave birth to a son, if we do not give birth to him in our place and our time. Then, then is the fullness of time".

We're already in the birthing room. I've even got some ideas about the next version of Zion's t-shirts. All we need do is say "yes".