

JUST SAY YES!

Gabriel was sent with a message. That was his job. Actually, Archangels really are the managers of angels who are usually the messengers. But in this case the Archangel Gabriel was sent by God to deliver the message himself. If you attended Fr. Jim's Sunday school last week you learned that Catholics believe there are 9 levels of angels, from Serephims and Cherubims whose job is to be caretakers of the throne of God, on down to Archangels and Angels which are the lowest ranking angels...these are the messengers. The word angel does not describe a characteristic (as we so often use the term...she is an angel) but rather angel is more of a job description. They are not dead people who God put wings on and made into angels but separate spirit beings created by God. I find the study of angels...angelology to be fascinating. Gabriel appears several times in the Bible. His first appearance is in Daniel delivering explanations of Daniel's visions. In Islam, Gabriel was the angel through whom God revealed the Quran to Muhammad. You recall that he delivered the message to Zechariah in an earlier Luke Gospel. Gabriel is called the chief of the four favored angels and the spirit of truth. For just a mement let us look at the Annunciation from Gabriel's point of view.

Theologian Frederick Buechner wrote in his book, "Peculiar Treasures" concerning today's gospel lesson: "She struck the angel Gabriel as hardly old enough to have a child at all, let alone THIS child, but he'd been entrusted with a message to give her and he gave it. He told her what the child was to be named, and who he was to be, and something about the mystery that was to come upon her. "You mustn't be afraid, Mary.'

He said. And as he said it, he only hoped she wouldn't notice that beneath the great golden wings, he himself was trembling with fear to think that the whole future of creation hung now on the answer of a girl."

The whole future of creation hung now on the answer of a girl.

Imagine all the angels gathered around, looking down, holding their collective breath.

"What will she say? Will she do it? C'mon, Mary, say YES!" The angels knew that the only way God works is by allowing people freely to answer, "yes." No coercion, no bribery, no trickery...just simply He allows people to freely say yes, or no.

It seems that freedom of choice is the only way God interacts with humans. Even though God dreams that our answers will be yes, YES to turning the world upside down and bringing the kingdom into the present hurting, confused, and torn world, He never forces people to respond with love. Obedience would not be the best choice if people didn't truly have the option of disobedience as well.

We see it all the time. God allows people to be in complete charge of their own lives, He allows people to have their own ideas of how to make their own way. How to Get their own way; only to find themselves imprisoned by their own designs, to hit the proverbial bottom. As God watches his creation destroy themselves and others, He also gives us a firm place to stand and say, "Okay, yes, I give up. YOUR Will Be Done."

Since the days of the garden, God has respected our freedom---free will if you choose. If this had not been the case God would not have come up with so many different ways to get people to respond, YES! So now in our Gospel those ways of God to get people to say yes had culminated in this moment when an angel stands before a girl, answering her questions, his knees knocking together, trying to keep the quiver out of his voice, as he and all the angelic hosts and even God wait. Will she do it? Will she say, “YES”?

We know Mary’s answer and through the last 2,000 + years mankind has been amazed at her obedience. “Here am I, the servant of the Lord. Let it be with me according to your word.”

Here AM I...with this answer, all the angels and heaven rejoice and the baby Jesus is born, grows into the man bringing light into our darkness, hope, and peace and freedom. These simple words of Mary change everything. And they still do. They are words that can change everything for us, even today.

Advent is a time of expectation, of waiting, and hoping. Advent for me is more than anything a time of excitement and anticipation as we look forward to the hope and the promise of new life that the savior’s birth can bring. It is my belief that what God really wants from us at this time of year (at ALL times) is to not do things that keep drawing us away from God. Whether we realize it or not God is always rushing to meet us with open arms of love for mankind, and for the whole of creation. The only way the kingdom of God can be alive right here right now is for us to say YES to God.

What does it mean to say YES to God. I'm not talking about an "Altar Call" kind of a YES, although those probably work for some people. I'm talking about the kind of YES that means rolling up your sleeves and doing something to make God's creation what He meant it to be. A place of equality, a place where the least among us will be the first, a place where all of mankind is treated with dignity. A place where we make the choice to conserve instead of consume. A place where we don't just look the other way when we see injustice. A place where a 13 year old granddaughter says to her grandmother. "Here is the Christmas money I've saved, let's use it to buy a sleeping bag for a homeless person." "HERE AM I, THE SERVANT OF THE LORD" These words can change everything.

When we say these words we know that we are not alone and that we are indeed in good company. Mary wasn't the first person to say "Here Am I".

Noah said it when God asked him to build a floating zoo and spend 40 days not just seasick but seasick with a lot of "stalls" to clean.

Others before him said "HERE AM I", too. Abraham said, Yes, and off he and Sarah went to a strange land, sight unseen.

Imagine Samuel's fear...a young man given the task of telling King Saul that all is not right with YOU and God. He could have very well lost his head for that and he knew it, yet he was obedient.

We've heard it said that when you are willing to serve God it is very freeing. How so? It is very freeing when you stop asking, "What's in it for me?" What can I get out of it? What have you done for me lately? There are as many ways to use your talents to spread the Good News of God in Christ as there are people on this earth. He wants people who do NOT put themselves first regardless of their jobs. As St. Francis said, 'Speak the Gospel everywhere you go and if must use words.'

If we present ourselves as servants of God then we are free to perform small acts of care and compassion as well as large ones.

Mary has already given birth to the Savior, so God won't ask you to do that. You can bet, though, that the angels are all holding their breath waiting to hear your "YES"
AMEN.