

Reflection: Fourth Sunday of Advent Luke 1:26-38

- This week I was talking to a friend who needed to vent. He was frustrated with the stress the holiday season sometimes brings. The ads, the shopping, the pressure to find the “perfect gift”.
- His comments led me think how lucky we are that God does not call us to celebrate Christmas the same way the commercial world calls us to celebrate Christmas. Let’s imagine for a minute what that would be like.
- Imagine we are looking in on heaven and we are in the conference room where all the big decisions get made. We see Jesus at the head of a long table and three advertising consultants are there giving God advice on how to focus the modern world on the true meaning of Christmas.
- The first advises “Lord we need to hit a nerve, play on their strongest emotions. Let’s show them the flames”
- The second consultant says: “ Let’s make them a little uneasy, fearful not to miss out. How about this “Church doors open at 3am with great door-buster deals.”
- The third consultant interrupts and says: “Lets play on their need for a good deal. How about this? Come into confession today, receive the grace of absolution and make no penance prayers until March 2021.”
- Thankfully, God does not call us to celebrate Christmas by using the same techniques the commercial world uses on us. God uses no flashy advertisements, no gimmicks, and no unattainable expectations.
- So what does God call us to do?
- God calls us to prepare and be open to a life-changing encounter with Him. We hear this call throughout Advent in our Gospel readings.
- Over the past two Sundays we heard John the Baptist speak about preparation. John urged the people of God

(then and now) to prepare for God by repenting for our sins. To live “changed” lives. Lives of prayer and good works.

- And today, at the close of Advent, our Gospel presents us with one of the most beautiful scenes in all of scripture. A prayerful, young Jewish woman – our mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary - encounters an Angel that delivers a remarkable message. And we recall what God reveals to His people through Mary: that by trust and preparation we will encounter God.
- Mary is the ultimate example of trust and preparation.
- Think about how Mary could have reacted when she saw that angel. She could have run in fear. She could have questioned her sanity wondering if what she saw and heard was real. But she did neither. Instead she believed, trusted that God was capable of doing what He promised.
- Think about the trust it took. A 14 year old girl, engaged to be married, learning she was to have a child - and not in the ordinary way. God would send that life to her in a unique, special way.
- Think of the ramifications that plan had for Mary. She had to tell her parents, she had to tell her fiancée Joseph and explain it was not his baby. Under the law of the day Joseph could have Mary put to death for this. Yet, Mary trusted in God. She was open to the encounter with God.
- Mary’s ability to say “yes” to God over and over again, to give her will over to God, was the result of an entire life of preparation. Mary lived the life John the Baptist proclaimed – a different life. A life of prayer and good works.
- In every important event in Mary’s life, the Gospel writers are quick to point out that Mary “pondered the events in her heart”. Mary prayed on things, she took time to reflect on things. To see God’s hand in things.

This prepared Mary to continually encounter God – and she let those encounters direct and change her life.

- We are called to that same preparation and life-changing encounter. That is the Advent message, a message we rarely hear from the commercial world.
- Sure Advent focuses our attention on Christmas, when we celebrate the birth of our Lord with great joy. But Advent also calls us to trust in God every day of our lives, no matter what joys or difficulties we find ourselves facing. Maybe there is trouble at work or home. Maybe we are dealing with a personal illness or the illness of a loved one. Maybe there is a big decision to be made and we are just not sure. God calls us to trust in Him – just as Mary trusted.
- Advent reminds us to prepare for God every day. To take time out of our busy lives and spend that time with God. We are reminded to pray, to reflect on the things happening in our life and to look for God's presence in these things. Like Mary we are called to spend time looking and listening for God.
- Every day provides us with new opportunities to encounter God. To say yes to God. To act on God's word, live out His plan for us – and let God change our lives.
- Aren't our encounters with God amazingly similar to Mary's encounters: God spoke to Mary, He dwelt within Mary and Mary found God in those around her. Our encounters with God are much the same: we hear God's voice in scripture and our prayer time, God dwells in us each time we receive Holy Communion and when we look carefully we see God in each other.
- The good news is there is still time to prepare. In these remaining days before Christmas lets promise to shake off the stress and anxiety and traps the commercial world places before us. Let the cooking and baking and

last minute gift buying be done with a sense of joy and thanksgiving. And let's set time aside for prayer.

- Let us take on Mary's attitude of trust and preparation. And let's be in awe this Christmas of the life-changing encounter God holds out to us –through knowing and loving and following His Son, Jesus.