

FAITH @ HOME

Week of December 20, 2020

Fourth Sunday of Advent

ADULT AND SMALL CHILD

READ: Luke 1:26-38

REFLECT: I don't know about you, but if the angel Gabriel suddenly appeared and told me that I was going to have a baby and that this baby was going to be the Son of God, I might be shaking in my sandals. How do you think you would feel? What kinds of questions would be going through your mind? Would you run away from the angel?

One of the most powerful parts of this story is when Gabriel says to Mary "Do not be afraid." I think that is a lot to ask, don't you?

Later in the passage, Gabriel says, "Nothing is impossible with God." Those words surround and comfort me like a warm blanket.

RESPOND: Make a stress ball. All you need to make stress balls are flour, a funnel, a black sharpie, and balloons. Stretch the opening of the balloon over the end of your funnel. Scoop flour into it and shake down till it fills your balloon. Tie the balloon off and draw on your face with the black sharpie! When things get stressful or difficult giving the balloons a squeeze can help relieve some tension.

ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTOR: ROGER HUTCHISON



Roger Hutchison is the Director of Christian Formation and Parish Life at Palmer Memorial Episcopal Church in Houston. An artist who paints with children and adults in a variety of contexts, he is the author of several books including *Jesus: God Among Us*, *The Painting Table*, and *The Very Best Day*. Roger serves as the chair of the Forma Council and is a member of the National Association of Grieving Children and the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators. He lives with his family outside of Houston, Texas.

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ADULT AND ELEMENTARY

READ: Luke 1:26-38

REFLECT: Certainly, Mary was God's most faithful servant. No one ever did what God asked more willingly than Mary. She had a plan to marry Joseph and live a quiet ordinary life, but things didn't turn out as she expected. She had to deal with angels, and accusations, and dangerous travel conditions, and odd royal visitors and a narrow escape to refuge in a faraway country. She did what God asked from her, but it wasn't easy.

Have you ever had to do something very, very hard? Maybe you had to go to school at home and not see your friends. Maybe you had to miss birthday parties and holiday gatherings. But you did it! Hooray for you!

Mary did what God asked because she loved God. We sometimes do what we're asked because we love people. Jesus said, "Love God and love your neighbor." I bet you didn't know that you are a lot like Mary.

RESPOND: We are God's hands and feet in the world and God gives us special work to do, just like God gave Mary a special job. Make a print of your hand with paint or ink, decorate your handprint and hang it on your tree or the refrigerator or someplace else. That handprint will remind you that you were born to do something important. You were born to serve God.

ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTOR: LISA PUCCIO



Lisa is the Coordinator for Special Needs Worship and Family Formation at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Houston, Texas. Lisa leads Rhythms of Grace Houston, a weekly worship service for special needs families, and oversees ministries for children and parents at St. Andrew's. She has worked in parish ministry since 2002, served two terms as vice president of Forma, and is a member of the diocesan formation advisory committee in the Diocese of Texas. Lisa and her husband Mike have four grown children.

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ADULT AND YOUTH

READ: Luke 1:26-38

REFLECT: Growing up, one of my favorite hymns was “The Angel Gabriel From Heaven Came.” The imagery of the hymn is amazing and I loved how intense the hymn sounded to me. This passage from Luke begins with background information about Jesus’s family (Joseph and Mary), what house they are from (David), and what town (Nazareth). Gabriel, an angel sent from God, visits Mary and tells her that she will conceive and give birth to Jesus. She responds that it is impossible for her to conceive, and Gabriel tells her that through God, nothing is impossible. Then, Mary closes with “Here am I.”

Angels do not come to us in the same way as Gabriel’s visit with Mary. Instead, God finds ways to communicate with us all of the time. Are you listening? Mary’s statement, “Here am I,” is amazing because she is putting her wants aside and opening herself to listen and follow God. Often, we tend to want God to reach out, but not always with an open heart like Mary.

RESPOND: How do you listen for God’s voice? According to the *Book of Common Prayer*, one of the types of prayers is oblation. Oblation is an offering of oneself in union with Christ, to serve God. Grab your journal or a piece of paper, and write a prayer, letter, journal entry, etc. to God. In this prayer or letter, the focus is to offer yourself and your life to God. After you are done, pray your prayer or review the letter. How does your life change if you truly invite God into your life to serve God’s goals?

ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTOR: WALLACE BENTON



Wallace Benton serves as the Assistant to the Rector for Youth Ministries at St. David's Episcopal Church in Roswell, GA. He's been fortunate to have grown up in the Episcopal Church and became interested in youth ministry after volunteering with his former youth program after college. Wallace has worked diocesan retreats and activities such as New Beginnings and Happening. Currently, he is the lay director for New Beginnings in the Diocese of Atlanta. He is also a member of the Episcopal Youth Ministry in ATL podcast (which you should check out immediately!)

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ADULT AND ADULT

READ: Luke 1:26-38

REFLECT: This past march 2020, I was still working as Communications Manager at Christ Church Cathedral, Indianapolis, when we were hit with the terrifying news that we could not go back to our church building, that all our meetings would be conducted through Zoom, and that worship had to happen online through livestream. To that, my answers were: *I only have space to work in the kitchen! What in the world is Zoom? and What do you mean "livestream?"* Your world, and mine, was rattled by this prophetic question: how can we continue being the church in the midst of a pandemic? And we now know that for the most part, we did, we have, and we will continue being the Church with God's help. It is ok to feel fear, to question how this can happen if we have never done it before. Our call is to say "yes" to God, even in the face of the unknown, and to choose to trust God as we figure things out. Just like Mary did when she said "yes" to the Angel Gabriel's announcement and put her trust in God.

RESPOND: I invite you to wear a mask the next time you go to the store, if you have not started wearing one already. I invite you say "yes" to the call to keep each other safe. If you have not worn a mask before, you might wonder what it will feel like physically and emotionally? And that is ok. It is ok to question it. At the end, all I can tell you is that it is one way to willingly keep each other safe, and there is only one way to find out what it will feel like.

ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTOR: YURI RODRIGUEZ



Yuri Rodriguez is a seminarian at Sewanee, the University of the South. She is from the Diocese of Indianapolis. Yuri is also an artist, singer, and educator who specializes in Latin American Music and Culture.

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