

Season of Advent—Week 2
5–11 December

Deepening the theme...



Into the Light by Juanita Madden (Aus. & NZ One Voice Project)

Meister Eckhart (13c) taught that we are not only children of God but mothers and fathers of God. Like Mary the mother of Jesus, we are called to be bearers of God in our world.

Eckhart once preached, “What good is it to me if Mary is full of grace and I am not also full of grace? What good is it to me for the Creator to give birth to his Son if I do not also give birth to him in my time and my culture? This, then, is the fullness of time: When the Son of God is begotten in us.”

Eckhart was so bold as to image a partnership of mutuality and generativity between God and human beings. So perhaps being a friend of God includes loving *what* God loves and loving *as* God loves.

Reflection 1

Luke 1:26–29

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary.

And he came to her and said, “Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.” But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.

(Cont.)

Mary's initial reaction is what some might call a hermeneutic of suspicion. What *kind* of greeting might this be from the angel? What might happen here? Why wouldn't Mary be suspicious? After all, an angel doesn't visit you every day!

Any number of past experiences could build up a hermeneutic of suspicion within us—being taken advantage of, suffering cruelty and harm, getting ourselves in places or relationships from which it was difficult to extricate ourselves. Such experiences can make trust difficult, thus dampening our ability to engage freely in life.

Recall a recent experience when you found yourself tempted to—or indeed *did*—hold back an opportunity to engage. Maybe you turned down an invitation to participate in an activity or event. Or you chose not to converse with a new person or offer kindness when there was an opportunity to do so.

It can be helpful sometimes to use your imagination to play out your anxieties and see what happens. Put yourself back in the situation that came to mind above and imagine it playing out differently.

- What do you say or do this time?
- What is the response?
- What insight does this give you for next time?

Author of Love:
You understand
why I do the things I do
and always have compassion for me
even when I withhold
the goodness and kindness
I might give.
Open me to your Spirit
that I might be self-giving and generous.
Amen

Reflection 2

Luke 1:30–33

The angel said to Mary, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and

the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

When it comes to vaccine hesitancy, one of the encouragements we often hear is to do it (be vaccinated) for those we love. Even if we may be indifferent to the need to be vaccinated or we may feel anxious about it, we are urged to get a jab to keep others healthy and safe.

Similarly, Gabriel seeks to widen Mary's view beyond her personal fear and any hesitancy she may have. “Do not be afraid, Mary,” says Gabriel and then goes on to inform Mary of the far-reaching implications of her saying YES to bearing Jesus.

(Cont.)

Recall a time (or times) when you agreed to do something for the sake of another. It might be as simple as going along with a certain activity or movie that wasn't your preference. Or maybe it was something more significant.

- How did your love or compassion for the other change how you approached the activity?
- What was it like for you as your yielding played itself out?
- How might this shape decisions for you going forward?

We are all virginal
when we receive You in us.
It is so sweet to have You,
but far sweeter it is to be
made fruitful by you.
And when that union becomes
a gift for others, it is clear—
this is not only for ourselves.

(from *Meister Eckhart's Book of Secrets*, Mark S. Burrows and Jon M. Sweeney)

Reflection 3

Luke 1:34–37

Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God."

The final sentence is heartening—*nothing will be impossible with God*. Gabriel seems to want to encourage Mary that God's activity is not limited by what she can imagine. However, this truth also invites our surrender. We are invited to yield to the One who can do more in and through us than we are able to do on our own power.

Sophy Burnham writes, "Mother Teresa called herself 'a pencil in the hand of God,' and St. Francis said he was God's donkey. Hildegard of Bingen referred to herself as 'a feather on the breath of God,' and Theresa of Lisieux was a 'ball in the hands of child Jesus.' There is enormous freedom in giving up, being guided by a higher power. Someone else is the chauffer, and you're just a passenger, going along for the ride."

- Which image in Burnham's quote resonates for you? Or do you have another image for your surrender to God?
- Consider an area of your life for which it is difficult to surrender to God right now? How might the image you chose speak into this area? What does it encourage?

God of possibilities:
Help me to lean into your love.
Strengthen my faith and trust.
Amen

Reflection 4

Luke 1:38

Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Rowan Williams describes Mary's conception by the Holy Spirit as "a moment when the creative action of God produced a reality as new in its way as the first moment of creation itself." He goes on to suggest this miraculous moment has implications for us as well saying, "The recognition of the uniqueness and newness of Jesus is a recognition of the absolute freedom of God to break the chains of cause and effect that lock us into our sins and failures; the virginal conception is an outward sign of this divine freedom to make new beginnings."

- How is the newness of Mary's conception good news for you right now?
- For what new reality or fresh beginning are you hoping?

All-Powerful and Loving God:
create in me
that willing disposition of Mary
that makes newness possible
and fresh starts
a daily occurrence.
Amen