

**Making Space for God through Faith**  
**based on Luke 1:26-31, 38, David Jahnke, 12/10/17**

Instead of reading Mary's song, I am going to read a part of something I read Tuesday night about how the coming of God has next to nothing to do with doing stuff. This is so important to remember for a couple of reasons: 1. First because a lot of us make ourselves so crazy-busy at this time of the year. 2. And second, when things do not feel quite right for us even though we have good work and are not bad people, we think that we must be doing something wrong and/or we must not be doing enough. So listen to God's Word from Loretta Ross-Gotta. ["To Be Virgin" from Watch for the Light, Orbis Press. See attachment at back.]

So life in Christ is all about loving relationships. And I am going to come back to how love does involve doing stuff for others. But when it comes to God, nothing needs to be done. It is God who does everything. In this week's lesson, Mary was simply visited. And after the visitation, she did not have to go out and find a good righteous man in order to conceive the Messiah; nor did she have to be perfectly righteous or smart or diligent. She had to 1. listen for God, 2. agree with God and 3. open herself up to God and wait. But how do we hear God?

I read an advent devotional from my favorite professor in seminary-- Cynthia Rigby. It was based on Isaiah's cry to God to come down and shake the mountains and make himself known to all the nations. My teacher confessed to wishing that God would do some of a wonderful thing of biblical proportions around her so that people might be awed and compelled into faith and service. And one day God will do that.

But that is just not the way it is for most of us who have not had great visions or other religious experiences. When it comes to God, most people have much in common with a 15-year old girl from Nazareth prior to or soon after the angel Gabriel's visitation. Many feel naive when it comes to God and the Bible just as a 14 or 15-year old Mary would have felt since she had not studied God's Law like her male counterparts would have. Many also feel judged by this world just like a pregnant but unwed Mary would have felt just a few months after this.

Know that God meets you right where you are and wants to breathe life and speak love to you. Whether you are grieving, chronically sick, anxious, weary from over-work, tired with the routine, stressed in your relationships, struggling with a particular sin; God comes to you this day. And all you have to do is open up by way of faith.

I watched a documentary on the Beatle George Harrison who was touched by Eastern mysticism and the idea that there is a way to experience God; that it is not about just believing what you have been told but rather discovering God. And he did that to a certain degree. He felt and produced so much beauty and love and that can only come through a connection with God.

And that did not happen because he was particularly righteous or brilliant but simply because he was intentional about opening himself up to God. So how intentional are you about your relationship with God? Do you get quiet on a regular basis; turning off the noise of this world in order to tune into God?

I will never forget a weekend retreat in Memphis Tennessee during my agnostic days. We had a time of silent prayer in the sanctuary and there was an icon of Christ with lots of candles around it. And I was staring at this beautiful image in this sacred space for 15-20 minutes...and something began to stir in me. But then somebody started talking about something...and the stirring was lost. And I was mad and decided that my mind was playing tricks on me; it was just a fantasy and a daydream.

Imagine if that was how Mary had taken her visit from the angel; that it was a dream or a hallucination; a trick of the devil; if she had not believed the Word of the Lord and opened herself up to the Holy Spirit.

So where is your heart regarding whether God speaks Love to you; where's your mind regarding whether you live and move and have your being in God? Skepticism puts up a wall to God's Spirit while faith opens the door.

Now some of you may not ever have any sort of immediate and special experience of God. And yet you find yourself content with believing what you have learned about God and with life in general. Consider yourself blessed among women and blessed among men!

I have a pastor friend who takes issue with the idea of a personal relationship with God rooted in experience. He once told me that he has felt burdened for over 40 years by never having a personal experience of God. I think he had some bad teachers in his life on a couple of levels. He should have never had a need to feel something mystical nor believed that something was wrong with him if he did not. At the same time, I had to ask him whether he hadn't personally experienced love, grace, peace and truth and personally related to these things?"