

I was speaking with a friend recently about the season of Advent.  
He mentioned something that I found to be quite interesting;  
He said that at the beginning of the Advent season,  
he found himself longing for it to be over quickly.  
He wanted to get to Christmas without having to wait too long.

But,  
he said by the time he got to the 4th Sunday of Advent,  
he didn't want it to end.

It's like a really great book or movie:  
we read books and watch movies with the hope that by the end, we will leave the experience  
feeling totally fulfilled and satisfied.

But,  
when the story has us so engrossed and intrigued,  
we often don't want it to ever end!  
I must tell you, I agree with my friend.  
I have found myself really enjoying this season of waiting --  
and seeking --  
the Lord.

The great advent hymns that we have been singing;  
the lighting of the Advent candles,  
and the various Advent prayers and scriptures we have been reading.

Don't get me wrong,  
I LOVE Christmas,  
but the I am finding the journey to Christmas to be  
almost as joyful and meaningful.

Throughout these first three weeks we have been thinking and praying about the traditional  
themes of Advent:

Hope, Peace and Joy.

I have loved thinking about the profound impact these themes have had in my life.

To think about how we must have hope:

and not just any hope,  
but the hope that through Christ,  
peace -- or shalom -- is possible in this world.

And what a mysterious and beautiful blessing to experience hope and peace as we chase after  
God in the pursuit of Joy.

This week,  
we look at the forth theme.

I would argue this one is the foundation of the other themes:

LOVE!

I did a search on youtube using only the word Love.

All of the top results were songs with the word Love in the title.

In fact, the first one that came up was the Blacked-Peas song "Where is the Love?"

In this forth week of Advent,

the theme of Love is found in another song:

The Magnificat,  
or The Song of Mary.

Mary has gone to the home of her cousin Elizabeth to share this amazing, terrifying news.

Elizabeth, who had never thought she would get pregnant,

and who was now well beyond her childbearing years,

is miraculously pregnant with John the Baptist.

She greets Mary with joy, and the baby John leaps in her womb. Elizabeth praises Mary for her faithfulness,

and Mary responds with this humble song.

The Magnificat is the most well known song in all of Christendom.

For hundreds of years,

Christians have prayed the magnificat in daily prayer.

In evening prayer, it is the first canticle suggested after the first scripture lesson of Evening Prayer,

because the magnificat is such an important part of the Christian message.

This lowly 14 year old girl,

allows herself to be overtaken by the love of God,

in the form of a baby boy.

This child who would go on to die on the cross because of --

and for --

His mother.

I don't mean the cross was Mary's fault alone,

but it was all of humanity's fault,

because of our sin nature.

How incredible that her son was also her savior!

God is going to do the unimaginable,

something so contrary to reason and logic:

he used an individual who,

in her time and culture,

would have been viewed as one of the lowest types of people:

young,

female,

and an unmarried, pregnant virgin.

And this young, poor 14 year old girl cries out,

"My soul magnifies the Lord."

Doesn't this whole picture spit in the face of all our preconceived notions?

But that is what the Gospel is about.

The Gospel shows us that God is not limited by our understandings,

our human logic,

and our small minds.

No,

God through the Ever Blessed Virgin,

defies how things “ought to be”  
and He turns them into what they really are for His glory.

The thing about love,  
is that it is mysterious.

Just look at Jen and I!

Any sane person that meets us immediately should be asking themselves,  
How in the world did that happen!

I tell people that Jen’s willingness to marry me is proof that there is a God,  
and He loves me very much!

In order for us to receive and give Love,  
we must be willing to accept the mysteriousness of it.

There is a verse to the hymn O, Come O, Come Emmanuel that is rarely sung which declares  
what Our Lady has embarked on.

It says,

O Virgin of virgins, how shall this be?

For neither before thee was any like thee,

nor shall there be after.

Daughters of Jerusalem,

why marvel ye at me?

The thing which ye behold is a divine mystery.

At some point,  
we need to be able to say:

“I have no clue how this all works,  
but I am willing to try it.”

Not only has Almighty God  
chosen to dwell within the womb of the unlikely candidate Mary,  
but He also chooses to do this with each and everyone of us.

In the book of Acts,

St. Luke writes this:

“And Jesus said to them,

‘It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.

But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you.’”

Does this phrase,

“The Holy Spirit comes upon you” sound familiar?

Look at our Gospel reading for today.

“The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High  
will overshadow you;”

The exact phrase the angel uses to declare to Mary how she will conceive the Son of God, is the same one used by Jesus to describe what will happen to us!

Listen Men,

don't get nervous,

but God wants to get us pregnant.

He wants us to provide a dwelling place in which he can reside.

Not in our bellies,

but in our hearts,

to empower us to be holy men and women of God.

But we must do as that young girl did some two thousand years ago.

We must say Yes!

Just like Mary was willing to consent to God overtaking her,

we must allow God to do the same in us.

If Mary had said no,

and did not make herself available,

we don't know if Christ comes into the world.

In this sense,

Mary is the first convert to Christianity!

Without Mary's consent,

God does not become man.

Bernard of Clairvaux illustrates this beautifully.

He writes:

“The angel awaits your answer,

for it is time to return to the one who sent him...

O Lady,

give the answer...

the answer that earth,

that hell,

that heaven itself,

waits.

The King and Lord of all

now yearns for your consenting answer

as much as he once desired your beauty...

Why are you hesitating?

Why are you fearful?

Look.

The desire of the nations stands at the door and knocks.

Oh,

what if he should pass by while you hesitate?

Get up!

make haste,

open!...

Get up by faith,

make haste by devotion...open by consent!"

The ramifications of Mary's,

and ultimately our,

responses,

have an impact beyond our own understanding.

In the Letter to the Romans, St. Paul declares,

"all of creation is waiting for the redemption of humanity."

The rest of the world needs you and I say to say Yes to God,

and to His love.

If and when we finally say yes to allowing God to dwell in our lives;

in every fiber of our being,

in every decision we make,

in every interaction we have,

we will then know what it means to have the savior of the world dwelling in each and every one of us.

After the sermon,

before we say the creed,

we will have a brief time for quiet reflection and prayer.

Isn't it rare for quiet around the holidays?

In this last week of Advent,

with so little time before the coming of our Lord on Christmas,

how will you respond to God's invitation?

"The angel,

awaits YOUR answer."

Amen.