



Joyfully Joining in With God

Scripture Reading: Luke 1:26-38

I have a friend who recently helped her father move into an assisted living residence. It is a perfect new home for him. Except for the fact that it's not. Indeed, he, and she, would rather not have had to move him at all. He's appreciative, and not. She's happy about it, and not. Life is often like that. We

seek the best and do our best, but we can never completely escape the pain, sorrow, and struggle that are always a part of life in our broken and far from perfect world.

The joy God offers in Christmas comes to us in this broken and far from perfect world. It is not a joy that provides an immediate way out of life's struggles, but rather the strength we need to make our way through them and even improve upon them as we go. In Sunday's Gospel Lesson, the angel Gabriel invites Mary to join in with the redemptive work of God in the world. She says, "Yes," and experiences incredible joy, as her song in Luke 1:46-55 makes clear. What is also clear, though, is that she will need this joy in the Lord, always, to sustain and strengthen her through the shame, struggle, and grief she will experience ahead.

"The joy of the Lord is your strength," Nehemiah (8:10) proclaimed to the Hebrew people as they responded to God's Word in challenging times. Like Mary, they needed to say, "Yes," and lean on the strength of God's joy as they ventured forward to do God's will through the hardships ahead. There is a joy, as they and Mary and so many others have discovered, in saying, "Yes," to God and joining in with what God is doing. And that joy sustains us and strengthens us for and through it all.

The true and abiding joy of Christmas is experienced as we, like Mary said, "Yes," to God's invitation to join in God's redemptive work in the world. Saying, "Yes," to God also means saying, "Yes," to the challenges, shame, and grief that come with the job and with the territory. But it also means saying, "Yes," to the joy the Lord provides. Indeed, it is a joy that can only be experienced as we join with God to do our part, imperfect and partial as our part may be. As we do, the joy of the Lord is our strength and, by God's grace and to God's glory, we will find ourselves a part of accomplishing abundantly far more than all we could ask or imagine. Mary sure did!

Prayer:

God of Christmas, I praise you for coming to us and loving us, imperfect and unrighteous people living in an imperfect and broken world. Thank you. Forgive my sins and renew within me the joy of my salvation, that rejoicing in your grace, I may overflow with your love and join you in your redeeming work in the world; through Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Suggested Verse for Meditation and Memorization:

Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."
Luke 1:38

Some Thing(s) to Try:

- Meditate on the suggested verse of the week. Try changing the name from Mary to your own name as you reflect on the verse. Then, try emphasizing different words each time you read or recite the verse, noting how each word directs your thinking.
- Practice sitting still with God away from distractions for five minutes or more each day Try slowly breathing in and out, saying, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”
- Pray about what God is calling you to say, “Yes,” to. Is there something for the day ahead? Is there something for the week ahead? The year ahead? Say, “Yes!”
- Practice praying in the way the Apostle Paul urges us to in Philippians 4:6-7. Talk with God about the things that trouble you, raising up your head toward heaven to the God who loves you. Give thanks for God’s faithfulness, that he sees you, hears you, and answers you as you pray. Pray with joyful confidence and thanksgiving. Breathe in God’s peace.
- As you head into challenging situations today/this week, stand still, raise up your head, give thanks for God’s presence, and pray for the Holy Spirit to fill you wisdom, faith, and love.

Further Suggested Readings:

- Micah 5:2-5a
- Luke 1:39-45
- Luke 1:46-55
- Psalm 80:1-7
- Hebrews 10:5-10