



The Induction of The Rev. Kelly Duncan at St. George's, Fort Langley

Luke 1:26-38

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, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor 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." 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." 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.

As I read draft after wonderful draft of this very liturgy, it struck me just how much preparation goes into an induction.

- There is the preparation of the liturgy, itself—the investigation of liturgical options and the final decisions on readings, component parts, flow, and Eucharistic Prayer.
- There is the preparation surrounding all who will play what role in the induction: deacon, bishop's chaplain, preacher, vergers, crucifer, someone to lead the prayers, presenters of the gifts to the new incumbent, oblation bearers, Eucharistic ministers, greeters and sidespeople.
- There is the preparation related to the reception: the set-up, the drinks and the preparation of something called "squares."

- And, finally, there are all the surrounding preparations needed by others who will serve in or attend the induction: things like the parish office preparing the service leaflet, the Executive Archdeacon preparing the Oaths and Subscriptions and the License of Institution documents; the musician's preparation and rehearsal of the music, the Regional Archdeacon and the Regional Dean's preparation of their remarks of welcome, clergy preparing their vestments, lay people picking out the clothes they will wear, the Bishop packing up the crozier and the mitre, everyone figuring out their transportation plans to the event.

Have you had enough?

Suffice it to say that the days, the hours and even the minutes leading up to an induction are full of the kind of steady and at times feverish preparation that surround many, many important events: events that we care about, events that mark a new beginning, in this case a new relationship, a new coming together that will mean that the dignifying love of God will be experienced and mediated to the world in a new way.

The story of the people of God as recorded in Scripture, is, of course, full of stories of preparation.

- The Genesis account of creation with its six days of divine initiative, the creation of light and its separation from darkness, the creation of water and dry land, the creation of plants and animals of every kind: all are a kind of build up and preparation for the creation of human beings, those created in the image and likeness of God and who are to care for God's creation.
- The account we heard just yesterday of the preparation of the children of Israel for their journey from bondage to freedom—their preparing and eating of roasted lamb, bitter herbs and unleavened bread, their doing this with their loins girded, their sandals on their feet and their staffs in their hands, all in preparation for their hurried departure from Egypt by a God who was determined that his people should be free.
- The attempted preparation of the people of God in God's sending of the prophets, one after another, to call the people back to faithfulness in the midst of whatever wrong headedness or wrong heartedness they have become captive to. These are just a few of the record of God's own attempts to prepare and then to prepare again his beloved ones to both live in his love and to mediate that love to the world.

Which brings us to tonight's Gospel: the one appointed for the celebration of the Feast of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary. This story, Luke's story of the Annunciation to Mary, follows directly on the heels of yet another preparation story, the story of Elizabeth, the wife of Zechariah, and the remarkable way that she, an older woman, would become pregnant, Elizabeth and Zechariah, of course, being the parents of John the Baptist, the one born to prepare the way for Jesus' public ministry.

But here's the rub, the wonderful rub. Even preceded by this preparation story, even preceded by all the Scriptural stories of a God who prepares the way and then prepares the way again for the coming of the dignifying love of God into people's lives, the story of young Mary standing before the Angel Gabriel is at its core a story of one who was unprepared for what was about to happen. For Gabriel tells Mary that she will conceive and bear a son, not with her husband but through the Holy Spirit of God, something unprecedented in all of Scripture, something in fact "impossible" as the Angel Gabriel says, an impossible thing only made possible by God.

And though we hear Mary's trepidations in her response to the angel's greeting of her as favored one, though Gabriel perceives her as fearful, though Mary could not have been fully prepared for all that was about to happen to her immediately and ultimately, Mary is able to give the response of many of the unprepared but faithful in Scripture: "Here I am," she says. And in those words we hear the declarations of Abraham, Moses and Isaiah. "Here I am," she says. "Be it unto me according to your word."

And with this simple willingness to say "yes" and to open herself to the power of God's Holy Spirit, the dignifying love of God filled her and she became the one through whom all of us have received grace upon grace, to borrow language from another Gospel for a moment.

Yes, much preparation by many, many people has brought us all to this night. For the parish of St. George's this preparation has not only been about all the separate acts of preparation that I mentioned at the beginning of this sermon but, even more importantly, the preparation that is its history—its ups and downs—its people, clergy and laity, living and dead—all these things have prepared the parish for this very moment tonight. For Kelly, the same is true. Everything that has come before—her upbringing, her education, her personal life, her work experience in and outside the Church, all her brilliance and her mistakes, all her joys and her pain have prepared her and brought her to this night.

And yet at the same time, here you both are, parish and new incumbent, by the grace of God, fresh and new, unprepared, and wondering, like Mary, what sort of thing is about to happen—and this is all just as it should be. But know this, if you, like Mary, are willing to say "yes" to each other now and "yes" to each other in your life together as it takes its twists and turns, its own ups and downs: if you, like Mary, together are willing to create an empty space of openness, prayer, wondering and discernment here, God's Holy Spirit will come upon you and within you as parish and incumbent. And Christ will again be born: here and now.

For Christ is born through the boldness of our many yes's to each other. And Christ is drawn not only to the faithfulness of our careful preparedness but also to the places where we are ill equipped, unprepared and questioning. For it is in these places that we have only Christ to rely upon, only Christ to look to, only Christ to trust in.