

For Advent this year, I've been reading a daily devotional entitled *Christ in the Rubble*. Each day offers a reflection from a Palestinian Christian wrestling with how to find hope, peace, joy, and love in horrific circumstances. Living through a genocide that has largely been ignored by the world, these writers stand their ground with what they call *sacred resistance*. Their witness challenges all of us to remember that Mary and Joseph found the courage to say yes to God two thousand years ago in a time strikingly similar to our own.

You can see that context in the image from your Trinity notes—page 10 or 14. Take a moment to go there now. Jesus was born into a very dark place for Palestinians. There was Roman occupation. A puppet king trying to buy his way into Jewish favor by rebuilding Solomon's Temple. Fast-forward to today: even if the current cease-fire holds, digging out of the rubble will take decades—if rebuilding is even possible.

And yet, Advent calls us to hope, peace, joy, and love.

This year especially, we are reminded that hope is something we must *practice* when times are dark. So I always look for glimmers of it. I met Terry at a 10k I ran in yesterday. Jogging along, sharing stories, he told me he starts his day by telling himself to "Get going before your brain figures anything out!" Terry gave me hope.

Time spent this past Thursday with my guys at Lompoc Prison, talking about personal responsibility and owning our mistakes. I was caught completely off guard as these men spoke openly about what they had done—and how deeply they regretted the harm they had caused others. With tears streaming down their faces, I listened to their heartfelt commitments to make restitution. They gave me hope.

I had the sweet opportunity to officiate Gregory and Serena Swanson's wedding at Rincon Beach in early August. Their love for one another continues to give me hope.

My daughter Danielle is home for the holidays. She always gives me hope that the younger generation will help us find a way out of the darkness we are living in now.

And many of us are being called to respond with sacred resistance to the violence used to arrest immigrants, and to rhetoric from our elected leaders that label constitutionally grounded guidance about not obeying illegal orders from some of our Senators as

treason and punishable by death?—even rhetorically—that is the kind of language that reflects authoritarian reasoning totally incompatible with our democratic rule.

Advent always carries a double weight. It is the season of hope, when we remember that Christ has come into the world, and the season of longing, when we confess that his work of reconciliation is not yet complete.

Two weeks ago, I decided to make candy for the cookie walk. I don't have much of a sweet tooth—but when it comes to my mother-in-law's English toffee, let's just say, one piece is never enough. It's a simple, beautiful recipe: butter and sugar cooked to 310 degrees, poured over Marcona almonds, and topped with chocolate. What's not to like?

I didn't get to know Dawn's mom before she passed, but I hear she was quite a gal—and, like my own mom, a great baker. Dawn and I have a three-ring binder of her favorite recipes, and they all share one thing in common: they leave out the little details great bakers assume everyone knows.

Details like how to combine sugar and butter so they don't separate. That process is called *emulsion*—combining ingredients so they behave as a single, uniform substance. Yes, the mixture needs to reach 310 degrees—but NO, you don't rush it. You use lower heat. You give the butter and sugar time to get to know one another before they bond.

So what does that have to do with our gospel reading for this fourth Sunday of Advent—celebrating Love?

Both Matthew and Luke highlight Mary and Joseph's willingness to say yes to God. In Luke, Mary consents to bearing God's Son, knowing it may mean social shame, isolation, or raising a child alone. In today's reading from Matthew, Joseph says yes too—agreeing to wed Mary despite her pregnancy, a decision that required a pretty convincing dream.

Last week, Colleen said something that stayed with me. She challenged us not only to pray, but to ***be the prayer***. When we do that, our Advent prayers take on new energy. We become co-creators, partners if you will, **in the change** God is bringing into the world. In saying yes, we consent to giving birth to God's presence in our lives.

Amy-Jill Levine, my favorite New Testament scholar, reminds us that God's reign is already pressing in—but remains unfinished enough that our choices still matter. She is referring to the *now and not yet* of Scripture.

What I learned from making candy this week is that hope isn't about choosing between the now and the not yet. It's about learning how to hold them together long enough for something new to be born.

Levine is careful to read Mary not as a plaster saint who already knows the ending, but as a first-century Jewish woman consenting to an open future shaped by God's promise.

Mary's "Let it be with me according to your word" is:

- **Now:** a concrete, embodied decision
- **And** consent to a future whose costs and outcomes are unknown

Her yes was not agreement with a finished plan, but trust in the character of the God who spoke. In the Magnificat, **she sings God's future in the past tense**—lifting the lowly, filling the hungry—before any of it has visibly come to pass. God's kingdom entered the world through her body even as its fullness remained unfinished.

Mary's faith did not spare her fear, vulnerability, or the long ache of waiting. Faith, as she shows us, is not certainty or control—but the courage to live faithfully inside an unresolved promise.

Mary and Joseph didn't know.

They trusted.

And in that trust, they found the courage to say yes to the impossible.

As Carol Ann sings the song, Mary Did You Know for us now, I invite you to listen for the still, small voice asking something of you—to let go of pride, to risk compassion, to say yes without knowing the outcome—as we await the coming of Emmanuel, God with us, God within us, waiting to be born.

<https://youtu.be/v003OzeBMWo?si=OXezGqrYy5nLXr3Z> (Pentatonix Version)

The song keeps asking the same question:

“Mary, did you know?”

But did you notice it never answers it.

Advent is not the season of answers.

Advent is the season of consent.

(Pause)

Mary is never praised for what she understood.

She is blessed for what she trusted.

And Mary responds—not with certainty,
but with her body, her future, her life.

So maybe the real question is not,

Did Mary know?

but:

Are we willing to say yes without knowing who will misunderstand us?

Are we willing to say yes without knowing the cost?

Are we willing to say yes without knowing how much suffering compassion will expose
us to?

Hope is not choosing between what is and what will be.

It is learning to hold them together long enough for something new to be born.

Hope does not end in answers; it becomes love willing to dwell among us.

This is the work of Advent, and it begins with our yes.

God bless you, Amen.