

Saying Yes to God's Love

We have looked at three ways of being prepared for the coming of Christ this Advent Season.

We have stressed the need to keep the vision of God's kingdom alive in our hearts - that vision that gives hope as it tells us about the purpose and meaning of life.

We have looked at the wonder of how God's peace comes as a gift to us when we seek it, when we turn from those things that build walls between us and our neighbors and our God and follow in the path shown to us by Jesus,

And we have briefly spoken of how God grants his gift of joy to those whose hands are open to give and receive the blessings that he pours out on his faithful people.

Today - as we see Christmas approaching, I want us to consider the importance of our saying Yes to God's love and how our saying yes to love is able to bring to birth in our world, a new and marvelous thing, how it prepares us and others for the coming of the Messiah.

You know the Christmas Story is strongly reliant upon something that most people find very strange. It is reliant upon two people saying yes to God.

And saying yes in most unusual circumstances, to a proposal that seems most strange indeed.

We are all keenly aware of Mary and how she said yes to God, and so came to be the mother of the Messiah, mother of the one we call the Son of God, mother of the one who would die so that we might live.

But have you considered how this Yes profoundly changed the course of Mary's life? How her willingness to trust the angel of God and to accept his word altered her entire world?

Engaged to be married, she is suddenly to be with child by one who is not the man she loves.

The risks are tremendous.

And what is this child of God's love to be?

This child that she says yes to when she opens her life so totally to God?

At the time that Mary conceived there were many Messiahs, many folk who proclaimed they had been chosen of God to take the throne of David,

- to take David's throne back from the corruption of the rulers who sat upon it

- to take it back from the control of the many who had manipulated it since the fall of Jerusalem: from the Persians, the Greeks, the

Egyptians - and now the Romans,

-to take it back and to sit upon it and bring to Israel that time that God had promised would come.

There were many Messiahs at the time Mary conceived.

Most of these were either ridiculed or were killed or both.

So why would her child - this child she was told would be of God be any different?

Truly Mary had a lot to store up in her heart and ponder, as the scriptures tell us over and over again that she did, she had not only to store up the angel greetings and the words of shepherds and wise men and prophets, she had to ponder what all these would do with her life and the lives of her child and of her husband.

And Joseph?

What did it mean for him to say yes to God?

How easy could have it been?

Joseph is the odd man out in the Christmas Story, isn't he?

A minister I know tells the story about how once a worried mother phoned the church office on the afternoon before the annual Christmas program to say her small son, who was to play the role of Joseph in the Christmas Pageant, had a cold and had gone to bed on doctor's orders.

"It's too late now to get another Joseph," the director of the play said. "We'll just have to write him out of the script."

And they did! Joseph just disappeared! And few of those who watched that night actually realized Joseph was missing."

Joseph is often forgotten.

But consider his role in bringing Jesus into this world for a minute.

Without Joseph how would Mary have been supported? Her family would have been bound by the law to reject her if Joseph had rejected her. Her baby would have been seen as illegitimate. Her life, and his, would have been in a ruin.

Joseph nurtured and protected and watched over and loved both Mary and her child. And so brought into the world - as much as did Mary - that child whom we call the gift of God's love.

But how easy could it have been at first?

How easy could it have been for him to say yes to the Angel who came to him and told him that the story that Mary had told him was true?

It is hard to believe many of the things that God tells us, hard to accept, especially when our feelings have been hurt and our sense of what is really possible in our world is limited by the pain we experience and the pain which we see in the world around us.

Could it have been any different for Joseph?

Joseph, the scriptures tell us, was a righteous man, a good man, a kind man.

He didn't want to expose Mary to public disgrace, but he certainly didn't want to marry her either, in fact he had resolved to cancel their betrothal just before the angel finally appeared to him.

It must have been hard for him to accept what he heard - yet, with the same kind of faith with which Mary said yes to God, so did Joseph. He said yes to God and he took Mary to be his wife.

And what would the future bring?

What would Mary's and Joseph's Yes to God bring?

It would bring to them a wonderfully intimate experience of God's love.

It would bring to them and to the world not just the marvel of a new and tender life.

It would bring to them and the world the King of Love, the Shepherd of the Sheep, the one whom we await this day and the one whom we know already in our hearts if we too have said Yes to God.

You know the promise is to us - as well as to Mary and to Joseph.
The promise that if we say yes to God and his gift of Love we and our world will be blessed.

But it is no easy thing to say yes.

To say yes involves risks.

To say yes involves overcoming our sense of pain and hurt.

Think of the number of people whom you know who seem to live by the maxim:

"once burned, twice shy."

The number of people who are unwilling to risk accepting love, the number of people who are afraid to show the love God puts into every heart, the number of people who have erected a wall around their life so they will not ever again feel hurt or pain because of how an imperfect love has let them down.

Yet, ultimately, love is what it is all about - what living is all about, whether that love be the perfect love of God or the imperfect love of human kind.

Pain and hurt will come to us all - whether we love or not.

Pain and hurt will afflict us all - whether others love us or not.

They came to Mary. They came to Joseph. They came to Jesus.

The big question for us - is will that pain and hurt have any meaning?

- will it have any sense???

People unfamiliar with our God, marvel and wonder at the sign of his love we display. They marvel and wonder at the cross - a symbol of suffering - yet also a symbol of so much more. That cross signifies God loved us so much he gave his only son so we might not perish.

When we say Yes to God's love we say Yes to that which will change our lives and give to them meaning and purpose.

When we say Yes to God's love we say Yes to that which will transform our lives and give to them a radiance that transforms others.

I have talked to you over this Advent Season about being prepared for the coming of Christ into our lives.

I have spoken about hope - about peace - about joy - and now about love.

I urge you as you prepare for Christmas day to remember that these things: hope, peace, joy, and love, are gifts to us, not demands upon us.

They are gifts by which God comes to us and changes us and our world.

He will come

and as he did at the creation of the world

and at the tomb of Jesus

and he will bring order out of chaos

and life out of death.

This is the mission of our God in and through Christ Jesus our Lord, who by the power of the Holy Spirit can accomplish all things.