

NEXT STEPS Series: "The Wonder of It All" Message title: "The Wonder in Anticipation" **12/8/24**

Next Steps are designed to be used in your small group settings. Need a group? Let us help!

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you. ²⁹ But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² 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. ³³ He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴ Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin? ³⁵ 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. ³⁶ 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. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸ 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.

Luke 1:26-38 NRSV

Today is the second Sunday of the season of Advent. How are your preparations going? Are you ready for Christmas? Don't rush it. What have you done? What is yet to do?

Today's focus is on the amazing love of God. Oh, how He loves you! He makes a way for things to happen when it seems there is no way. Children approach Christmas with a childlike faith. Why? They are still children? What could we learn from their approach to this season?

A word that comes up in this scripture lesson is identical to the word found in last week's reading from Matthew. Afraid. Put yourself in Mary's position as you read through Luke 1:26-38 (printed above). What are your concerns? Notice that Mary does ask questions. They are not "why me?" or "can you pick someone else?" Her attitude is pretty much, "why not me?" Mary accepts the call placed on her life. Then it turns into a time of waiting. How does she wait? How would you be waiting? Notice that her fear turns into anticipation. How could you handle situations in a similar manner? Don't rush this one. Talk it out with your small group.

When we first read this account through Mary's eyes, you can get a sense of isolation or loneliness. Notice that God doesn't allow to remain the case. Yes, she has Emmanuel, "God with us", but she also has Elizabeth going through a similar situation (miracle birth). Look around. Who is going through something that could use your presence in their situation? Will you make yourself available? Remind them (and yourself) of what God has already done.

Ponder this one: In what area might God be calling you to activate holy imagination? How does Mary's faith inspire you to trust God differently, or more? How can you move from passive to active surrender? Let's open up to Him in faith.

The season of Advent is such a richer time when it is shared with others on the same journey. Who deserves to join you on this journey? When will you ask?

Remember, we have gathered in worship; now it is time to go and be the church.

"Living intentionally in a Christlike manner to bring glory to God"
the Church