

The Waiting Is Almost Over
Psalm 89:1-4, 19-29
Luke 1:26-38
Fort Hill Presbyterian Church
Clemson, SC
Fourth Sunday of Advent - December 24, 2017

Advent is a season of reflection, yet people scurry about to buy presents that are rarely needed. And in that frenzy of shopping many stand in line after line, **waiting** to be checked out. Others find themselves **waiting** on highways turned into parking lots, or **waiting** in airport terminals delayed by weather and power outages.

Advent is also about **waiting**. The **waiting** is almost over as this fourth Sunday of Advent falls on December 24th. This Advent I have reflected on two Christmases past and some gifts of **waiting** this season. The first was in 1989 when I was seven and a half months pregnant with our first child. Mark and I along with his grandparents Paw Paw and Grandmother Emily sat down on two love seats in the corner of the room. There Paw Paw laughed as I awkwardly waddled into my seat. He smiled at us and said, "Y'all look great! It was about 50 years ago at Christmas when she (pointing at Grandmother Emily) looked like you (pointing at me)." Then waving his hand over the crowd he finished with, "And look what happened!" He laughed again as we beheld the house of Morrison, about 35 strong. That is how I have told the story to my girls and nieces and nephew. This week I actually counted whom I remember being there and it was more like 19. I think that is the prophetic imagination at work—it tends to increase the blessing.

In Psalm 89 the writer recounts the prophet Nathan's oracle about God's covenant promise with David.

¹⁶ Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever. 2 Samuel 7:8-17

God would build the household of David so that a descendant from his line would rule forever. Steadfast love and faithfulness can do that. Mary, faithful Jew and engaged to Joseph of the house of David, would have known this prophecy. To know something is one thing, but to believe it is quite another. Scripture tells us that Mary was perplexed. Perhaps she worried about what it meant to be a favored one. In hindsight we know it was a life befitting of one whose name means "bittersweet." For in saying "Yes" with the words, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord. Let it be with me according to your word," Mary would experience a life of the deepest sorrows and the highest joys.

In saying "Yes" she risked her life by escaping at night to Egypt, by threats of danger, and by the immense grief of watching her first born be crucified. And she rejoiced with song at the sharing of her news with Elizabeth, was proud of her son Jesus at the wedding at Cana, and overjoyed at his resurrection from the dead. We learn from Mary that God's favoritism has its sacrifices as well as its blessings, that Mary's life would be changed forever. And she said, "Yes" not knowing what all that would mean. No one knows what it will mean for their life when one

says, “Yes” to God’s call. Mary teaches us that when God calls, we can say “Yes” and have faith that God will be with us through bad times and good times.

We are not told whether it is day or night when the angel Gabriel came to Mary with startling news that she would conceive by the Holy Spirit and give birth to the Son of God. I have always imagined this visitation by the angel occurring at night. I think it is because of John’s gospel imagery of light coming into the darkness and that we hear this Scripture during the increasingly dark days of Advent. And I even think it is because of the feeling of believing in the unbelievable—like when my brother and I were 8 and 5 and stayed up all night **waiting** down in the basement of our house listening for Santa on the roof. To this day, I know I heard sleigh bells. Yes, I think Gabriel told Mary under cover of darkness, for that fits with the impossible being made possible. I believe.

For me there is no doubt about the mystery of it all, but I believe that Gabriel was telling the truth and Mary could only say “Yes” to the truth.

- The truth draws courage out of us.
- The truth changes us, makes us strong in the face of fear, and even willing to risk our lives for it.
- “The truth will set you free,” Jesus says.ⁱ
- The truth is what Pilate did not know, see or hear when Jesus spoke to him.ⁱⁱ
- The truth is difficult especially at Advent when we take time to think about it. Do we really need all these trappings or simply the love that is being born in us today?

Mary’s “Yes” to the truth does not promise us a life that is easy, but does promise us that in saying “Yes” to God’s call we will be accompanied by love. “Jesus loves us this we know for the Bible tells us so.” That love is worth the wait, even of one more day.

The truth of the matter for Mary at this point meant **waiting**—**waiting** nine long months to think about what she had agreed to do, whom she had promised to bear, and how she was going to live.

It is in the **waiting** where we can reflect on what God is doing in us, for us, and with us. Maybe you have been waiting in a hospital this week—for a diagnosis, for a surgery of a loved one to be completed, for the birth of a grandchild, for a treatment to help you or a loved one to go on living.

Maybe you have been **waiting** on news for a job or an interview, waiting on a grade to pass that difficult course, waiting on a part to repair a toy or fix a car, waiting on a friend to visit after a long time apart.

Maybe you are **waiting** on a letter of acceptance to the college you want to attend, or waiting on a phone call from someone who needs you, but doesn’t know it yet.

Maybe you are **waiting** to say “Yes” to God when called to serve in some menial way.

For me the “Yes” to menial work this Advent was the blessing to serve at Our Daily Bread. It was on the snow day that came unexpectedly. I watched the folks who came to enjoy the hot meal prepared with love and laughter. The people waited patiently. I had been **waiting** a long

time to serve in this way and looked forward to meeting Jesus face to face in those who came to the table that day. I saw Jesus all over that room not just in the faces of my fellow servants. Jesus was

- in the lady who was cold whose eyes looked like a child's at Christmas, filled with excitement at the snow.
- in the fearful eyes of the man who did not know where he would sleep if it got too cold and the snow lay on the ground.
- in the grateful eyes of the elderly woman who would call Joan by name smiling a toothless grin.
- in the young man whose eyes and anxiousness told the story of addiction and living beyond the edge.
- in the women whose eyes sparkled after having brought five children to the table, teaching them manners and gratitude.

They all **waited** patiently for those who rode the third bus to arrive and be served too. Then the call for "seconds" brought some through the line again. One hundred in all and the five children. There was enough food with a little leftover. I am sure it was like other miracles that people of faith experience. I went home tired and thankful and thinking. In my **waiting**, I have been thinking about how to shelter the homeless in Clemson, how to shelter the faces of Jesus.

One of my menial task this week has been to blow the leaves off the back porch and yard so the family can gather around the fire pit and toss in written woes of 2017 to burn. Me? I would rather sing Christmas carols in the cold crisp nighttime air. For singing, like Mary is hope-filled, like another menial task this week, washing the cup and paten and pitcher after breaking bread and sharing the cup of blessing in home communion with those who cannot be present with us. As people of faith our calling is to hope, to share the Good News of this King who reigns forever.

Waiting, I have learned, is God's way of giving us time—time to reflect, time to quiet ourselves and listen as well as to behold what God is doing and calling us to share, and time to be changed. **Waiting** may be among the best gifts we receive this year. Thank God for Advent **waiting!**

So I ask you to **wait**. **Wait** one more day. **Wait** on the Christ Child to be born anew. Servants **wait** on and attend to the King. When granted an audience, like Mary of lowly estate, may we bow our wills before the King, her child, the Son of the Most High, the Son of God.

Let us too risk our lives by saying, Yes, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord. Let it be with me according to your word."

ⁱ John 8:32.

ⁱⁱ John 18:37-38.