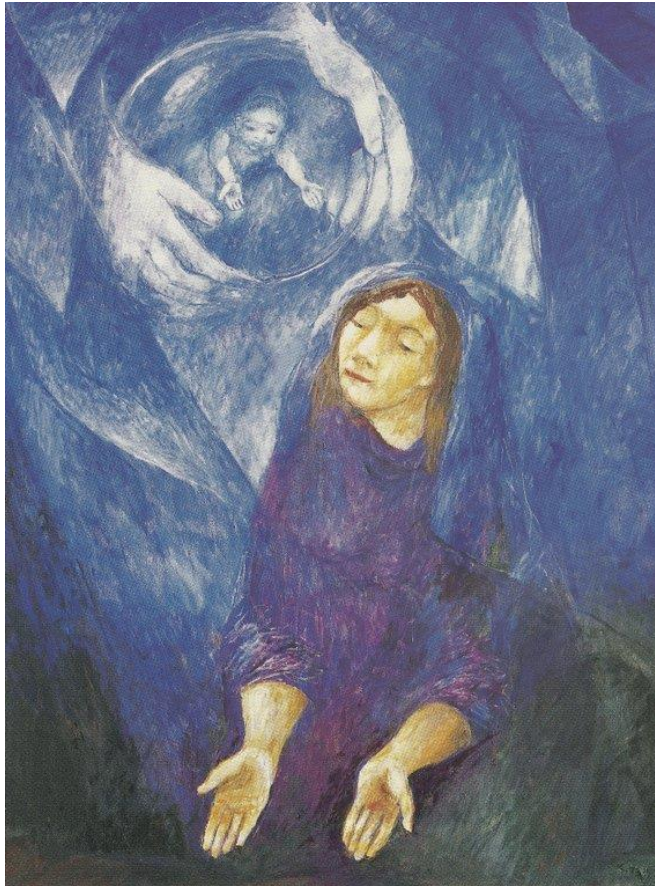


Today we begin the Second Week in Advent ~

We light this second candle to honour Mary and Joseph, who dreamed and saw visions and trusted the Holy One with their lives and strange happenings, while God trusted them with God's own essence and hopes.



Sieger Koder

Music for the second week of Advent:

Carol: Joy to the world the Lord has come. Let earth receive her king.
Let every heart prepare him room, and heaven and nature sing...

Taize: Nothing can trouble nothing can frighten. Those who seek God shall never go wanting
Nothing can trouble nothing can frighten. God alone fills us.
Nada te turbe nada te espante, quien a Dios tiene nada le falta.
Nada te turbe, nada te espante: Solo Dios basta.

Handel's Messiah: Chorus: And the glory, the glory of the Lord shall be revealed

Usually we approach Scripture with the expectation of readings its words and thinking about their meaning. Yet when we read anything that tells a story or relates to life issues, we always use more than our intellects. Using our imaginations opens us to encounter God more directly than our intellects allow. Today you are invited to bring your whole selves to God in meditation and prayer. Ask the Holy One to guide you to be open and attentive.

Read this passage through to remind yourself of Joseph's story as Matthew tells it - and use your imagination to set the scene as vividly as you can: what would you see? what would you hear? What is in the background? What is the emotional atmosphere like? Take time to let the scene unfold.

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband, Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "Look, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." When Joseph awoke from sleep he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

Now let yourself become part of this scene. Without forcing anything, what are you drawn to in the story? Perhaps you identify particularly with one of the characters, and take that role. Or maybe you are a bystander, a child, a serving boy, watching what is happening.

When you have found your place, allow the story to unfold: re-play the video in your imagination.

Now that you are part of the scene, notice how you find yourself responding – your thoughts, actions, feelings. It may be that the narrative unfolds a little differently to the biblical account. Notice what happens and trust God to take you there. Do you find yourself interacting with one of the characters? Is there anything you want to say or ask? Is there anything another wants to say to you? How do you respond?

When your imaginary journey through the story has come to an end, take some minutes to reflect. Consider how what happened might blend with your real life situation. How is the God of surprises nudging you? Allow this to lead to prayer, and journal your reflections. Linger as long as need be.

**Glory be to God the Creator, the Holy Human One, and the Loving Spirit,
as it was in the beginning , is now and will be forever. AMEN.**

Today is Day Two in the Second Week in Advent ~

We light this second candle to honour Mary and Joseph, who dreamed and saw visions and trusted the Holy One with their lives and strange happenings, while God trusted them with God's own essence and hopes.

Two Bible passages today, from Ruth and Matthew, bring a perspective on Joseph and Mary:

When Boaz had eaten and drunk, and he was content, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. Then [Ruth] came stealthily and uncovered his feet and lay down. At midnight the man was startled, and turned over, and there lying at his feet was a woman! He said: "Who are you?" and she answered, "I am Ruth, your servant: spread your cloak over your servant for you are next-of-kin." He said, "May you be blessed of the Lord, my daughter; this last instance of your loyalty is better than the first; you have not gone after young men whether poor or rich. And now my daughter, I will do for you all that you ask ... Remain this night ... as the Lord lives, I will be the one with the right to redeem you." So she lay at his feet till morning, but got up before one person could recognise another... So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When they came together, the Lord made her conceive, and she bore a son.

Salmon [was] the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David ... and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.

The genealogy of Jesus is startling evidence of God's gentle persistence in overwhelming, with good, the chaotic actions of humankind: Judah visited prostitutes, Rahab deceived by covering up her night visitors; David had an affair and murdered; Solomon flirted with other spirits; all to arrive at Joseph, the right man as a husband, to provide a safe tender place for Mary to be able to welcome and surrender her body to God. (Mary's own forbears seem to be irrelevant – good on her!) Boaz gently offers a similar hospitality of heart and hearth to Ruth.

Stay with these two tender interludes of truly gentle men, carefully respecting the dignity of vulnerable women, and be oh, so grateful.

How do you care, or have you cared, for another vulnerable person? Perhaps, like most of us, you can also recall when you have trampled on another's fragile self. Talk to the God who is Love about all the feelings that surface.

As you read the passages again, consider how God's tender care of you is reflected in this story.

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Today is Day Three in the Second Week in Advent ~

We light this candle to honour Mary and Joseph, who dreamed and saw visions and trusted the Holy One with their lives and strange happenings, while God trusted them with God's own essence and hopes.

Mary told her story to Luke, like this:

In the sixth month [of Zechariah and Elizabeth's pregnancy] the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee, 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, favoured 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 favour 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 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 of you 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 of her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Consider - in the light of your two Advent wreath candles:

"It is no longer we who live, but it is Christ who lives in us," Paul explains.

"How can this be?" we wonder.

"Can Christ be formed in us?"

For nothing will be impossible with God.

"Here I am, the servant of the Lord: let it be with me as you say ..."

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as it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. AMEN.**

Today is Day Four in the Second Week in Advent ~

We light this candle to honour Mary and Joseph, who dreamed and saw visions and trusted the Holy One with their lives and strange happenings, while God trusted them with God's own essence and hopes

When we are facing turmoil and significant shifts in our lives, isn't it so good to have a friend to hold us? And so often one's heart leaps in empathy and community on the shared faith journey.

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord". . . And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home. (Luke 1 : 39 - 45, 56)

How have I been this safe place of refuge for a friend ?

Who have been the generous hearts, mentors, open-hearth-people for me?

I treasure these times and people and give thanks.

As I read about the interaction of these two women again, I consider whom I might go to spend time with. I ask God for the openness and transparency required for mutual blessing in the face of life-changing events.

Oh the comfort, the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with a person,
having neither to weigh thoughts nor measure words,
but to pour them all out, just as they are, chaff and grain together,
knowing that a faithful hand will take and sift them,
keep what is worth keeping and then,
with the breath of kindness, blow the rest away.

- George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans)

**Glory be to God the Creator, the Holy Human One, and the Loving Spirit,
as it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. AMEN.**

Today is Day Five in the Second Week in Advent ~

We light this candle to honour Mary and Joseph, who dreamed and saw visions and trusted the Holy One with their lives and strange happenings, while God trusted them with God's own essence and hopes

Luke tells us that Mary wrote and sang this song in her first trimester of pregnancy. Many of us aren't able to be creative in these three particular ways, but maybe her simple joy and humility still brings a message for us two thousand years later.

Trusting that the Spirit is here to help you, read through this passage several times really slowly. You may find that reading aloud helps you slow down.

Let the words move deeply into your being, like refreshing rain into dry soil. Allow a word or phrase to touch you. Listen for the Holy One to speak.

And Mary said,
My soul magnifies the Lord,
And my spirit rejoices in God my saviour
For he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely from now on all generations shall call me blessed,
For the Mighty One has done great things for me
And holy is his name.
His mercy is on those who fear him
From generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm
He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
And lifted up the lowly;
He has filled the hungry with good things,
And sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel
In remembrance of his mercy,
According to the promise he made to our ancestors
To Abraham and his descendants forever."

As you continue in prayer now, reflect on the word or phrase that has touched you, exploring what it means to you here and now. Let the word or phrase connect with your, or a friend's, situation.

Respond to God about what you have thought, and noticed through this reading and reflection. Maybe creativity isn't too far away after all: write or pray your response, dance or paint or even sing your response: in gratitude, trust, longing, repentance or intercession.

Feel free ... for as long as it takes.

Sit quietly now with God, at rest in the presence of the One who loves you. Be still, trusting that the Holy Spirit is at work in the depths of your spirit deepening your faith. Allow the Word to move from your head to your heart to dwell there in peace-full silence. Take a leaf from Mary's book.

Glory be to God the Creator, the Holy Human One, and the Loving Spirit,
as it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. AMEN.



Botticelli: The Annunciation (1481)

Today is day Six in the Second Week in Advent ~

We light this candle to honour Mary and Joseph, who dreamed and saw visions and trusted the Holy One with their lives and strange happenings, while God trusted them with God's own essence and hopes

Be still and know that I am God

Be still and know that I am

Be still and know

Be still

Be

silence

Where were the places of greatest resonance in your meditations this week?

Return to that reading and reflection again.

Ask God to take you deeper in what God's Spirit revealed to you.

Wait on God.

As this second week of Advent draws to a close, give thanks for the many good women and men who dreamed and saw visions and trusted the Holy One with their lives and strange happenings, while God trusted them with God's own essence and hopes

**Glory be to God the Creator, the Holy Human One, and the Loving Spirit,
as it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. AMEN.**