

## **“Nothing Is Impossible: #morepeace”**

December 10, 2017

*Angels Among Us* series – 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent

Mary was fairly ordinary from an out-of-the-way place (Nazareth). Her visit from the angel is one of the most talked about encounters in all of Scripture. Her role and calling as Jesus’ mother - the bearer of the Christ child - is revered by millions of people around the world. She is one to whom our Catholic brothers and sisters pray. She is the Christmas pageant part that many children want to play.

I wonder if it’s because this is all just so extraordinary. “Nothing is impossible, Mary. You will bear a son who will be the Savior of the world. Elizabeth, who everyone thought couldn’t possibly have a child, will have a son, too.”

Mary is called to risk and to believe that the impossible is possible with God. She’s given her purpose as a servant of God. What the angel says first is important. Mary is favored - or blessed. She will be able to participate with God for God’s purposes of bringing hope and peace to earth. Even before Gabriel says, “do not be afraid,” the message to her is “you’re highly favored.” And what a message to receive! It’s no wonder that Mary is perplexed! It’s no wonder that she has a few questions!

But I also wonder how the angel appeared to her. Take a look at this funny take on why angels always start with “do not be afraid.”

(SHOW MEDIA)

Did the angel look other-worldly, scary, or terrifying? For Mary, is she not supposed to be afraid of the angel and the message? What’s coming is cause enough for anyone to be afraid, especially because she was subject to total ridicule. Potentially her life could be ruined if Joseph followed the law. She could’ve been killed.

I’m still convinced that we miss some dialogue before Mary says, “Here I am, let it be.” I think Mary had more to say. I wonder if she argued with God or asked for clarification. I wonder if she used the excuses I can come up with: *Why me? Why now? This is inconvenient. This is not in my plan. This is not what I want to do. I’m too young. I have no idea how to be a mother to the Son of God.* Truly, how would you and I respond?

It’s notable that Elizabeth becomes another messenger and affirms the angel’s message. Elizabeth is also the first one to call Jesus “Lord” even before he is born into the world! Elizabeth is a mentor who offers affirmation and encouragement that allows Mary to sing with confidence and boldness because what we ultimately hear is God’s message through Mary when she sings this song of justice and joy about who Jesus is and how he will change the world.

This child in her womb - the Son of God - will go up against the expectations of the rich, the proud, and the powerful. This child will show God's love for the poor, the meek, and those who are most vulnerable.

Mary is an expectant mother, but she's so much more. She is a messenger of God's good news. She is a prophet who speaks God's truth to those who need to hear it – and probably to those who don't want to hear it.

Hers is a song of justice that brings peace for all those who live in the world. Peace begins with seeing one another as God's beloved. Some would say you can't have true peace until there is justice. In the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Mary sings about God's power and the powerlessness of humankind.

She also challenges us to think about how we move from a place of denial saying "how can this be?" to a place of confidence, assurance, and peace. She accepts *what is* rather than getting stuck in asking *what if?* Or *why?* She doesn't allow her fear to become denial, but finds peace with God and opens herself to serving God in an incredible way.

We can easily find ourselves wishing life was different. Maybe you wish for a different job. *I wish my relationships were healthier. I want this health issue to be resolved. I want to be happy. I wish my finances were in better order.* And the list goes on of what we wish for...

We can spend a lot of time and energy wishing and hoping, but not doing much to change the situation. We can even get stuck seeking perfection and waiting for things to be just so, which always takes our focus off of what is and keeps us striving for something we can't attain.

In these days when we have so much information at our fingertips, it's easy to become anxious about many things we can't control and then move to a place of fear. Now granted, sometimes there's a lot we can't change, but we also can't allow fear to move us into a place of denial. *I can't possibly do anything to change my situation.* Author Rhonda Britten wrote a book called *Fearless Living*, and in it she writes, "Fear is the gatekeeper of your comfort zone."

Think about that. Fear can keep us comfortable. But if we want to find peace, we have to pay attention to how God might be working even in those difficult situations. We can let go of the fear that leads to denial and, instead, actively engage in our lives and in the world rather than sitting back passively waiting for things to change for us without any work on our part.

Maybe we can't change certain things, but we can choose to respond differently. As someone wrote, "Peace comes when we accept *what is* and are able to use our energy to live into *what's next.*"

That's a challenge for all of us. God is at work all the time, but these encounters in Jesus' birth story teach us that people had to respond - not staying focused on "what if?" but accepting *what is* and living into *what's next?* Especially as we consider being messengers of more peace, asking *what's next?* is important.

The topic of more peace-making is always timely. Peace around the world is nothing new, but the situation in Jerusalem and the Middle East is on my mind. Jerusalem is a holy place for Jews, Muslims, and Christians. Jerusalem is a home to Israelis and Palestinians. I pray for a lasting peace there, and I pray for Israelis and Palestinians to be able to live together in peace sharing the space.

So, if we're seeking peace, then it's not simply an idealistic notion. Ivan found a peace sign necklace in a box of memorabilia this week, and as we talked, I thought again about the difficult road to seeking peace. Seeking peace requires effort on our part. Many times it means compromise, giving up something for the common good, and even selflessness. For Mary to submit to God's plan, she had to be selfless. It was not her way, but being open to God's way.

Sometimes we look around for peace. We think peace can be found in food, alcohol, drugs, sex, or a number of other avenues that can become addictions quickly. Those things can't offer us true peace. God can, but it requires us to participate and to act. We live our faith. We seek justice. We pursue peace.

Peace for Mary comes in knowing that God will make a way and that she can participate in it. Like Zechariah and Elizabeth, she's been waiting, too. She knows there are many who have been waiting. And even in this moment when she may not see the full blessing, Mary sings.

So it's not just the angel who is a messenger of God. Elizabeth and Mary serve as messengers, too - speaking of who Jesus is and what he will do.

I encountered some other messengers who taught me about peace this week. First, one of the saints in our congregation who is struggling with some health issues. She said, "I'm ready. I've lived a good life." She proceeded to tell me of her marriage that lasted many years, her husband who was a blessing to her, and her sense of God's presence.

She had an assurance - a peace that passes understanding. It was powerful to encounter and made me celebrate how she has nurtured her relationship with God over many years. It didn't just appear that day when she was struggling. It has been built over many years and is a witness to those around her.

Another messenger is a distant friend on Facebook. She was a year ahead of me in school. And she's recently begun a journey to sobriety. She's made it very public. She's been very vulnerable and open about the struggles and joys of overcoming an

addiction to alcohol. And it's moving to read her journey of waking up sober with a clearer mind and a heart that's more at peace.

I thought of a mother and family surrounding a daughter who is battling serious illness – and the peace that the mother has because of the prayers of so many people that surround her.

More peace...what a concept! Sometimes it seems like a dream, and yet, we are messengers of more peace. One of the New Testament letters says that we “seek peace and pursue it.” We move out of what is comfortable knowing that God is with us.

I believe there are angels among us. We can be messengers of peace, flying in the face of fear, for nothing is impossible with God.

May God help us.

### *Prayers of the People*

BEFORE last hymn:

We close with a Christmas favorite that you might just hear this week, perhaps in a store or on your radio. It proclaims the message of the angels, “peace on earth, goodwill to all.” Let us sing now with a prayer that our lives this week will spread peace and goodwill.

Let's sing together #218...

### **Mission to the Messengers - SHOW SLIDE**

Every week we have a mission if we choose to accept it. It is a mission with a message. So I'm inviting you to be “hashtaggers of peace” and to share our quote meme for the week from our church Facebook page to your Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or Snapchat accounts and hashtag it #morepeace. If you're not into social media, I invite you to share these words with someone: write it down and mail it to someone, give it to someone, take a photo of it and send it in a message—whatever you can do in whatever channels of communication are available to you:

*If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.  
(Mother Theresa) #morepeace #donotbeafraid*

Look again at the candles of hope and peace. Let's proclaim the message we must take to the world:

**Do not be afraid** (repeat 3 times)