

Trinity Church Sermons  
4 Advent, Year B  
December 21, 2008  
The Rev. Sare Gordy  
“She Sat Alone”

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She sat alone in her room when the angel came  
(or was it a vision?  
A hallucination?  
Did someone walk into her room?  
Was she expecting them?  
Did he frighten the life out of her?  
He must have, because the first words out of his mouth  
Were,)

Greetings, favored one, God is with you,  
Said the angel  
And just like you or I,  
She was confused.  
Who is this strange person  
Who had accosted me as I go about my life?  
How did he get in here?  
What does he want from me?  
He shouldn't be in here.  
My father is going to be angry  
My mother will cry  
I hope Joseph doesn't find out  
Does this man want to ruin my reputation,  
Coming to visit me alone?  
What sort of stranger accosts someone  
With words like that?  
*Greetings, favored one, God is with you.*  
Is he some sort of prophet?  
I hope the Romans don't find out  
They seem to be interested in this area  
And I don't want to cause trouble for my family

But then there is an interruption  
To her perplexity -  
Don't be afraid, said the angel.  
(And I've always wondered about that, you know?  
In the modern media, angels are pretty  
Disarmingly so

According to Hollywood  
Angels are beautiful, attractive, and they just instantly draw you in  
Not so, it would seem, with the angels of God  
Perhaps they're beautiful  
I wouldn't want to rule that out  
But still, I think they must be terrifying, too,  
Or the first words out of their mouths,  
Nearly every time we see one  
Wouldn't have to be:  
Don't be afraid.  
Maybe throwing in a  
I come in peace,  
For good measure.

Don't be afraid, said the angel  
The angel Gabriel,  
The man who walked into her room  
Without so much as an 'excuse me,  
Is Mary, the betrothed of Joseph at home?'  
Don't be afraid, said the vision,  
The hallucination,  
The intruder,  
The prophet.)

And then the rest of the words pour out  
*You have found favor with God*  
*You will conceive in your womb*  
*You will bear a son*  
*You will name him Jesus,*  
*He will be great.*  
*He will be called the Son of the Most High.*  
*The Lord God will give him the throne of David.*  
*He will reign over the house of Jacob, forever.*  
*His kingdom will have no end.*

Stunned, as anyone might be,  
Perhaps it was normal for her mind to snap  
To the practical, the immediate  
For immediate it would be:  
Her life would be forfeit  
When word got out  
That she cheated on her fiancé.

And so she asks,  
How can this be, since I am a virgin?  
(Which brings up the question:

Does Mary need to be a virgin  
For this story to be true?  
Does the conception need to be a miracle  
For Jesus to have any merit?  
And which would have been a greater miracle  
At the time?  
For Mary to be a virgin, and pregnant,  
Remembering that every Caesar worth his salt  
Was the product of a virgin birth,  
Or was the larger miracle  
The fact that Joseph didn't demand his rights  
To have her stoned to death?  
Was the larger miracle  
The fact that on the eve of dismissing her back  
Back to her family to live in shame, but at least to live  
Joseph has his own vision  
His own angelic eye-opening  
Saying,  
*Marry her anyway.*  
*The boy will need a father.*

And whether it was a strange quirk of divine intervention  
This virgin birth thing  
Recorded, as you see, in more traditions than just our own,  
Or whether it was an historical plot device  
Intended to do as it did:  
Point out with a neon sign worthy of the Las Vegas strip  
The one single fact:  
***This is a Very Important Person being born!***  
The point is well made, virgin or no virgin:  
Something rather phenomenal is about to happen.

Something rather phenomenal is about to happen.  
And Mary is called to play a part in it  
Someone needs to  
And that day is her day.

And after not too much conversation,  
Mary says, okay.

And this makes me think of us, here, today  
On the cusp of Christmas,  
But despite what the radio stations would have us believe  
Despite how malls and commercials and TV specials want us to feel  
We're not there yet.  
We're in the highly unpopular period of waiting before Christmas,

And have you noticed?  
Patience, and the ability to wait with grace  
Is not highly prized in our society just at present.

And yet,  
That is just what Mary had to do  
Wait.  
Wait, as she began to show  
Wait, and wonder if Joseph was going to call her out  
Out in front of everyone to assert his rights  
To have her killed  
Wait, traveling to her cousin Elisabeth  
To live and wait  
And wait  
And wait  
And wait  
Until Joseph comes to collect her,  
To go be counted in a census  
Travelling in the worst possible time  
In winter, nine months pregnant  
As big as a whale, and all her joints hurt  
And her first birth – away from her mother  
And sisters  
And cousins,  
Everyone who could have lent a hand  
Smoothed her brow  
And told her to push  
Been there, in case something bad happens  
If the baby is breech, or malformed, or not breathing...  
In case something happened to *her*  
Until finally, it's late  
It's dark  
The contractions are coming closer now  
And she's stuck with the cows  
And a fiancé who has never once birthed a child

Did she know that ahead of time, I wonder?  
Did the Angel Gabriel let just a hint of it slip?  
Would she have said yes if she'd known any of it?  
Did she have even a gut feeling about the manger  
Or the fact that when full grown her son's senses would leave him  
And he'd start preaching for God and against the Romans  
Who would then kill him for his effort?  
Did she have a sense that at some point in history  
She herself would be deified?  
But that few would remember her fear, her patience,

Or her ability to wait with grace,  
Her ability to wait without knowing,  
Her ability to wait with acceptance  
As the plan unfolded around her  
And then, when the moment is right,  
To step into the dance and take her part?

We could learn a lot from her example:  
Listen for the voice of God  
Talk, and ask the questions that you have  
Accept the role you've been asked to play  
Wait with grace until the time is ripe  
And then enter the dance when the music starts  
And act out the role you've been called for  
And then... the world begins to change.

The world changes, because we have  
Listened  
Talked  
Accepted  
Waited  
And then Danced

And that... that is exactly what we are all going to be doing  
As a community  
Just after Christmas.  
In the month of January,  
As a community we are going gather together in small groups  
We are going to listen to one another  
And listen to the voice of God in our midst  
And we are going to talk, and ask our own questions  
And the subject will be this:  
*How is God calling us to name and heal the wounds of injustice?*  
And between us all, throughout all of our meetings, all of our gatherings,  
The voice of God will be heard.  
There are times when God is heard in the stillness, in the silence,  
And there are other times,  
Times like these,  
When God is heard in the cacophony of community  
And the only way to hear God's voice with integrity,  
In community,  
Is to gather as much of us together as can be found and to listen  
And to talk.  
And so, we will.

And then, at our Annual Meeting in the beginning of February,

We'll see what came of the meetings  
And we'll begin to accept  
What we are called, as a community, to do  
And then... we will wait.  
We will wait as we become focused  
We will wait as our tasks become distilled  
We will wait as the work before us grows and develops,  
Like a child in the womb,  
Day by day  
Becoming more defined,  
And then, when the time is right  
We will step out into the world and dance  
We will name and heal the wounds of injustice around us  
We will step into the dance for which we've been selected

And the world will be different,  
The world will be better,  
For us having been in it,  
For us having  
Listened  
Talked  
Accepted  
Waited  
And finally, danced.

Amen.