

4AdventB2023 Annunciation/Visitation

The Fiat of Mary By the Rev. Salying Wong

This morning, I'm thinking about Trevor Noah. Well, I'm really thinking about his mother. In his memoir, *Born a Crime*, Noah tells the story of his conception. It was South Africa and the country was still under apartheid. Among many of its racist laws was the law forbidding a white person and a black person from having babies together. It was a crime: the white person would be fined, but the black person could go to prison. Noah's mother was always breaking the law and she crowned her criminal activity by bearing a child with a white man. It wasn't an accident. Trevor Noah wasn't conceived in a moment of passion; he was conceived with intention. His mother desired to have a baby, and she had chosen the man, a white man. She knew the consequences. She did it anyway. Her child would be born a crime.

If Trevor Noah's mother had come to you with her plan, what would you say? Would you advise her against this? Would you say that a black woman in a South African prison was a bleak and terrible punishment, that she would inevitably be separated from her child, and what would that leave her? Would you say that the time isn't right? Why bring a colored child into the world while Apartheid could strangle his life?

Noah's mother reminds me a lot of Mary. Consider this story we read today called the Annunciation. Mary was betrothed. That means, she was under the law of possession. She was Joseph's property already before the wedding. An angel tells her to get pregnant (and not with Joseph) before the wedding date. This means, the angel was telling her to set herself up as an adulterer. If discovered, the laws of her time would demand she be dragged to the village center and stoned.

What if Mary came to you and told you this story, that an angel gave her this dangerous proposal. Would you say, “Why didn’t the Angel just wait till you were wedded, so that you wouldn’t be in such a terrible position?” “Would you say, ‘Mary, that was really stupid of you to say yes? How irresponsible!’”

I believe if we really understood Mary’s choice, we would be a bit afraid of her. For me, her choice—bold and rash—challenges my habits of moving toward security, safety, and self-preservation, which I fool myself by calling my behavior “responsible”. It discloses that these habits clothe my fears, my lack of courage. But even more, my lack of hope and trust in God. For, I confess that often when I look at the world, with all its violence and degradation, and I don’t think, now is the time to do something really brave to show the world that hope is here, that God is among us.

Mary is the bravest of women, and the brave always have a bit of the crazy in them. Consider another brave and slightly crazy woman, Elizabeth, bearing a child in her old age. Her fellow villagers would have raised their eyebrows at her, carrying a child way past childbearing age. She, too, is unmoved by public opinion. In fact, she’s not even moved by her husband Zechariah’s opinion. Good thing his tongue was still locked-up when Mary fled to Elizabeth’s home for refuge. Zechariah might not have let Mary in, might have yelled, “Get away from us you crazy, sinful woman. Do not pollute this pure household with your “virgin” pregnancy! I’m a priest for God’s sake!”

But, because Zechariah literally could not get a word in, Elizabeth got to speak, and boy did she speak, “Get out of the doorway, Zechariah and let her in. Blessed are you, Mary, among women! And blessed is the fruit of your womb. I thought that God couldn’t do the impossible, but I’m pregnant when I’ve been barren. Nothing is impossible with God!” Together, these two women are the most audacious, brave, hopeful, trusting women in the new testament. Now they are a team, and we would be right to be a bit scared of them.

Even so, let us consider the true fiat of Mary. It is not what we normally associate with power. Mary's fiat is the, "Let it be." "Let it be according to your word." Her power is the power of surrender to God's opaque plans. Her power is her trust in God. What is it to trust in God? It is to participate with God in the creation of salvation. Mary's fiat echoes God's fiat, when God said at the beginning of creation, "Let there be..." And this "let there be" continues to sustain all of creation. And when Mary said, "Let it be," she became a partner with God in creating something for the salvation of the world. This fiat is the power of love coming down, coming near, coming toward, coming for. This is why we call Mary the Theotokos, the God-bearer.

This fiat, the "Let it be" is not for Mary alone. It is also our fiat; in fact, if we are honest, it is our only power—the power to surrender to God, the power to say, "Let it be according to your word." When we do this, we leave our selfish, self-preserving ways behind and give our life in service to God's work for a world in such great need of hope. So, let us pray and ask God to form us, let us hear the voice of the Angel, "Do not be afraid," and let us follow the example of Mary and Elizabeth, and practice the fiat of, "Let it be."