

LET IT BE

by

Dr. L. James (Jim) Bankston

December 18, 2011

(Fourth Sunday of Advent)

8:30 and 11:05 a.m.



ST. PAUL'S

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Texts: 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Luke 1:47-55; Romans 16:25-27; and Luke 1:26-38

2 Samuel 7:1-11

⁷Now when the king was settled in his house, and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him, ²the king said to the prophet Nathan, “See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent.”

³Nathan said to the king, “Go, do all that you have in mind; for the Lord is with you.”

⁴But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan: ⁵Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the Lord: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? ⁶I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. ⁷Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, “Why have you not built me a house of cedar?” ⁸Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the Lord of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; ⁹and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. ¹⁰And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, ¹¹from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house.

Luke 1:26-38

²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.”

²⁹But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³²He will

be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

³⁴Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?”

³⁵The 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 will be holy; he will be called Son of God. ³⁶And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God.”

³⁸Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”

Then the angel departed from her.

The fourth Sunday in Advent usually focuses on the Annunciation, the announcement of some good news by an angel. There is more than one annunciation in the Christmas story.

In Matthew’s gospel, the angel appears to Joseph, not Mary. The angel tells Joseph of the miraculous birth that is about to happen and that he should stay with Mary, and that he should call the child to be born “Emmanuel,” God with us.

The first annunciation in Luke’s gospel is to Zechariah, husband of Elizabeth, parents to be of John the Baptist. John’s birth is also miraculous in that Elizabeth is well beyond child bearing years.

So there is an annunciation to Joseph and an annunciation to Zechariah, but the one we are most concerned about today is the annunciation to Mary. The angel Gabriel, the same one who had appeared to Zechariah, appears to Mary with an announcement of a miraculous birth that was both terrifying and wonderful. Luke’s gospel connects the birth of Jesus with the promise made long ago to David. The passage from 2 Samuel that we read today contains a promise that David’s house will be established forever. Jesus of the house and lineage of David is seen as the fulfillment of that promise.

When Mary is greeted by the angel, she is perplexed and ponders what sort of greeting this might be. Well, she should have. She is asked to give birth to a special child who will save and heal people. With some trepidation no doubt, she nevertheless replies, according to the text, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”

“Let it be,” a simple but faithful response made famous to those not that familiar to the Biblical text in the Beatles song from the 1970’s. Mary said yes to God. She was asked to make a home for Jesus, a sanctuary, a safe place for God if you will, and she said yes.

Sometimes people write me long emails, and I sometimes reply by just saying, “OK.” Maybe you have gotten one. To a pretty involved request, Mary said, “Let it be.” “OK.” “Yes.” There is an online comic strip called *Agnus Day*. The Day is spelled D-A-Y, like Agnus Day could be one of your aunts or cousins. But the comic strip is about religious humor, and it is a take off on the Latin words Agnus Dei, D-E-I, meaning Lamb of God. DEI, God, is the same Latin root word from which we get the word deity.

In the *Agnus Day* comic strip for this fourth Sunday in Advent, two sheep, lambs, are having a conversation about the annunciation. One of the sheep says, “What if Mary had said ‘No. This really isn’t a good time for me to be pregnant.’”

The other sheep says, “But she didn’t. God calls, and people heed the call. It’s pretty straight forward.”

Well, maybe that’s what the sheep think in the comic strip, and maybe it all seems pretty simple in the scripture. But in real life, we all know it is not always that easy to say yes to what God wants you to do.

In the latest liturgical calendar in the Lutheran Church, December 20 is set aside for the remembrance of Katharina von Bora, Martin Luther’s wife. For hundreds of years, clergy all male, had not had wives. The practice of unmarried priests dates at least to the fourth century. Luther not only initiated the Protestant Reformation of the church, he began the practice of married priests. Katharina von Bora, Katie, a nun at the time, fled the convent and said yes to becoming Martin Luther’s wife.

It was quite scandalous at the time.

Henry Langknect, professor at Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Columbus, Ohio, reminds us of what it meant to say yes to Martin Luther. Professor Langknect says, “Luther called Katie the ‘Morning Star of Wittenberg’ because she rose at 4 a.m. every day. She cooked for and fed the household, took care of the cattle, brewed beer, and ministered to the sick. She provided a home for 10 children, six of her own and four orphans and a constant stream of Luther’s students from the university. The first “Pastor’s” wife. Langknect adds his own commentary when he says, “Surely she was sometimes resentful, irritable and exhausted.”

Well, saying yes to becoming the first clergy spouse, preacher’s wife, had its challenges. But, I suspect that Katie Luther found some deep contentment in her new role where she had said yes to what she understood God to be asking her to do.

There are all kinds of responses to requests from God in the Bible.

Abraham and Sarah were asked to go to a new land, make a new home and begin a people that would live in covenant with God, and they picked up everything and left on a magnificent journey.

Moses was asked to go tell ole Pharaoh to let my people go. Moses complained that he was slow of speech and not up to the task, but he went anyway.

Jonah was asked by God to go to Nineveh, great enemy of the Hebrew people, and prophesy to them. Jonah promptly caught a boat in the opposite direction. Later, after the time in the belly of the large fish, he decided to go.

The early disciples were asked to leave their homes and families and livelihood as fishermen and become disciples of Jesus. The scripture says they dropped their nets and followed.

Mary was asked to say yes to the angel and provide a home in her body for Jesus, and she simply said, “Let it be.”

There are many stories in the Bible and in history as well as in today’s world of people saying yes to God, to what they understood God to be asking them to do.

Late one evening a professor sat at his desk working on the next day’s lectures. He shuffled through the papers and mail placed there by his housekeeper. He began

to throw them in the waste basket when one magazine, not even addressed to him but delivered to his office by mistake, caught his attention. It fell open to an article titled, "The Needs of the Congo Mission." The professor began reading it idly, but then was consumed by these words: "The need is great here. We have no one to work the northern province of Gabon in the central Congo. And it is my prayer as I write this article that God will lay His hand on one - one on whom, already, the Master's eyes have been cast - that he or she shall be called to this place to help us."

The professor closed the magazine and wrote in his diary: "My search is over." He gave himself to the Congo. The professor's name was Albert Schweitzer, the great medical missionary to Africa. That little article, hidden in a periodical intended for someone else, was placed by accident in Schweitzer's mailbox. By chance he noticed the title which seemed to leap out at him....Chance? Maybe, but it was an opportunity for Albert Schweitzer to say yes to God that made a difference in his life and in the lives of thousands of other people in Africa where he worked as a pastor and doctor.

In our world today, whether you are a football fan or not, you know the name of Tim Tebow, quarterback for the Denver Broncos. He has become well known for his late game heroics to lead his team to victory in six of the seven games he has started as a rookie quarterback. He is also known because he speaks often and publically about his Christian faith. You may or may not agree with his very public expression of his faith, but perhaps it is worth noting according to a recent article in the *Wall Street Journal* that Tim Tebow doesn't think God cares who wins football games. He does believe that God cares about how we live our lives. So when he can, he helps the kids in the orphanage that his parents run and finds time to visit sick children in the hospital. What Tim Tebow does on the football field doesn't matter to God as much as what he does off the field. He has found a way to say yes to God in the role that he has been given, and children are helped and encouraged. It is a good witness.

It is not just missionaries and sport stars and people in the Bible who are asked by God to say yes to God. God asks all sorts and kinds of people to do something that matters, to say yes to what God is asking them to do.

What do you think God may be asking you to do?

It may be something big or small, complex or simple, something you are inclined to do or something that you are not naturally inclined to do. Whatever it is, for our own sake and for the sake of someone for whom your yes will make a difference, I hope you will say let it be, OK, yes.

I was reading an article about a father and son who had become estranged because of a disagreement, a misunderstanding, and some hard feelings. The story was moving toward what I thought would be a reconciliation. When I got to the bottom of the page I was reading it said, "Continued on page 68." So I flipped over to the back of the magazine and found to my surprise that there was no page 68. The magazine ended on page 67. It was either a misprint or a page was left out, so I don't know how the story ended.

I don't know how this sermon may inspire you.

The world knows the story of Mary and Albert Schweitzer and Tim Tebow.

The world may never know about your story, but God knows and cares. Whatever you understand God to be asking you do to today, I trust you will say yes to God.