

The Birth of Love

Luke 1: 26-56

December 20, 2009

United Memorial

Will you join me in a moment of prayer?

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts and minds, be acceptable in your sight O God, our strength and our redeemer, amen.

What's your image of an angel?

They have lovely gossamer wings and flowing robes...

Halo?

We think of them as a protector... as in guardian angel?

Almost always depicted as females.

Calling someone angelic or a little angel usually means that they give us no trouble and that they always behave... much like all of your children.



And yet... and yet... do those images of angels come from our scriptures?

Or is that how they have been portrayed by artists down through the centuries and for the past 100 or so years through retailers and the media?

Shows like Touched by an Angel.

There are 194 references to angels in the singular

90 more references to pairs or groups of angels

2 references to archangels

And 57 references to cherubim, which were sort of a lesser angel.

And while I can't say that I checked out each and every reference, in scripture angels are portrayed as men!

And their appearance usually signified a struggle of some sort...

And warning...

A message...

They provoked fear and awe.

A couple of weeks ago we heard the story of Zechariah being visited by Gabriel and told that his wife would bear him a son in their old age.

Imagine the disruption in that.

One of our readings this morning is the story of the encounter between the angel Gabriel, a messenger from God, and a young woman.

A heavenly visitation and a young woman's response...

Can you imagine?

How did she know it wasn't a dream... the workings of her own imagination...

She had grown up with the Hebrew Scriptures, she knows that a visit from a messenger from God means at the very least, disruption in her life.

We can't really get inside the head of a young woman 2000 years ago, but Mary's role in the story of Jesus' birth is not to be taken lightly.

How did Mary know that this is what she was meant to do...

She may have even preferred it to be a dream...

But that was not to be... and sometime that night she said yes to God... she welcomed the birth of love within her.

She didn't know how this could be, but she was compelled to accept her vocation in life... to be the woman given the responsibility to bring God to life.

There is even a neat Greek word for this: Mary is referred to as theokotos or God bearer...

Her words, "Let it be with me according to your will" echoes in her son's words the night before he was crucified when he said, "Abba, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want."

Mary obviously was familiar with the prophets who spoke words of comfort to the poor and hungry and displaced and challenge to the rich and comfortable who did nothing to alleviate those conditions.

Listen to the words of her song that we call the Magnificat "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."

If that is not prophetic in the tradition of Jeremiah and Isaiah, I don't know what is.

She sang of a total reversal of the social order.

They are ideas that were echoed by Jesus when he grew up to be a man, such as these written in the gospel of Matthew, "But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first."

She obviously had a strong influence on her son... along with the priests and scribes of the synagogue.

Mary said yes!

How do we as individuals and a community of faith say yes?

How do we nurture the birth of love... love that is concerned for the well being of all God's children.

How do we know when we are being called by God?

Note that I say when, not if.

Because we are all called by God, both individually and communally.

Are we open to hear God's call on our lives?

Or do we make excuses?

God can't be calling me... Not me! Uh uh!

I'm just an ordinary person or I'm too old, too young, too short, too fat... not educated enough, too educated...

If we want to find an excuse one is easy enough to find.

But you know, God doesn't care...

And God is calling each one of you into ministry in some capacity...

One of God's messengers will visit you and give you an idea... who knows how your life might be transformed....

Who knows what may happen...

But please do not expect it to be a sweet, soothing encounter, because just as Gabrielle's encounter with Mary brought disruption into her life, so might your encounter bring disruption into yours...

Even if you ignore it, it may nag at you...God is persistent...

The best ideas and plans for ministry arise because one person has felt called to something... and their enthusiasm and passion catches on... and one person gets involved and another and another and pretty soon you have a program of some sort going!

Three examples that come immediately to mind are the prayer shawl ministry, our participation once again in the Brunswick Street Mission and our renewed commitment to the Mission & Service Fund.

All these things started with one person having a passion and commitment to something to further God's realm in our world.

What is God calling you to do?

Or rather, what is God calling us to do?

The Visioning Team, which has just started its work, is looking at that question, along with other.

Who are we?

What assets to we have?

And who is our neighbour.

United Memorial has a rich history of being concerned with neighbour... Our very foundations have their roots in concern for neighbour.

And because of that history and concern I am confident about the future.

A future that lies in the birth of love.

Remember the angel Gabriel who said, "Nothing is impossible with God."

To God be all honour and glory, world without end, amen.