



A Courageous 'Yes!'

Study Four



annunciation of Mary, Fra Angelico, c1426



If someone asked you to say yes to something without fully explaining what it would involve, how would you decide what to do?

No Thank You...

(Read 2 Samuel 7:1–11, 16)

“I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling.” (v 6)

There are times when our own plans, however well-meaning, might not be the right ones for a particular moment in our lives. We are forced to rethink, which can be frustrating at the very least. David is in a good place, settled in his palace, and the Lord had given him rest from the enemies around him. It seems a good time to build God a suitable and permanent house after being confined to a pop-up tent. Nathan the prophet agrees and says, ‘Go ahead!’

But then God intervenes. He has never asked for this and does not want it at this moment in time. He is content to simply be with his people wherever they go.

However, God will build David a house, but not using bricks and mortar. This will be a dynasty, a lasting legacy, and a promise that ‘your house and your kingdom shall endure for ever.’

David’s offer of service is not simply met with refusal, but with a far larger promise. Perhaps sometimes the most faithful expression isn’t to offer God something impressive but recognising the wonderful ways in which God is already building something in our own lives.

Discuss..

Can we sometimes become so focused on buildings, traditions or institutions that we miss God's presence elsewhere?

David wants to build something for God, but God says, 'I will build something for you.' What do you make of that reversal? Are there times when we need to stop trying to do things for God and simply receive what God wants to give us?

How does the Christmas story fit with the message of this passage about where and how God chooses to be present?

At Christmas we celebrate God choosing to make his home among us. What can it mean for us to make room for God in our lives this Advent?

It's a Mystery!

(Read Romans 16:25–27)

'..to the only wise God be glory for ever through Jesus Christ! Amen.' (v27)

Paul finishes what is a rather theologically dense letter by talking about a mystery that has been hidden for generations, and that is why this short passage belongs here, because Advent is about a mystery being revealed.

For generations, God's purposes were not fully understood. People waited, hoped and wondered what God was doing. Then, in Jesus, something that had been hidden was made known.

And what is this mystery? Paul tells us that the good news of Jesus Christ is for all nations. God's plan is bigger than

one people, one place or one moment in history. What God has been doing quietly and patiently is finally being made known.

And this is what gives Advent its sense of wonder – we're not simply looking back to a baby born in a stable but celebrating God's long-promised purpose to bring the world into a relationship with him through Christ.

Discuss..

What do you think Paul means by this 'mystery'? Why do you think God's purposes are sometimes revealed gradually rather than all at once?

What might help us recover a sense of wonder and mystery as we approach Christmas?

Paul ends with 'to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory for ever!' What does it mean to give God glory in ordinary, everyday life?

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(Read Luke 1:26–38)

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled."
Then the angel left her." (v 38)

We have heard this story so many times that perhaps we forget just how extraordinary it is. Mary is young, probably unknown outside her own community, and certainly not someone we would expect to be at the centre of God's great plans. And yet God comes to her with an invitation that will completely change her life.

Mary doesn't pretend to understand, but simply replies, 'I am the Lord's servant, May your word to me be fulfilled.' She doesn't know exactly what lies ahead. She cannot see how everything will work out. But she is willing to trust God and take the next step.



Antonello da Messina, *Virgin Annunciate*, 1473

We also may not always understand what God is doing at times, and we certainly cannot see the whole picture. But faith doesn't mean having all the answers, and sometimes it simply asks us to respond, 'Here I am, Lord. What would you like me to do?'

And perhaps, like Mary, we might discover that God can do far more through an ordinary life than we might imagine.

Discuss..

What does Mary's story tell us about the kinds of people God chooses to work through?

Is questioning God necessarily a sign of weak faith? What can we learn from Mary's willingness to ask questions?

In the portrait of Mary above, what might the artist have been trying to say in the expression on her face?

Mary couldn't see the whole journey ahead of her. Are there times when faith has meant taking the next step without knowing where the journey would lead?

Closing Prayer

Loving God,
as this Advent journey comes to an end,
we thank you for all that we have shared:
for your word that has spoken to us,
for the questions we have explored,
for the hope we have discovered,
and for the ways in which you have reminded us
that you are with us.
As Christmas draws near,
help us not to become so busy preparing for Christmas
that we forget to prepare our hearts for Christ.
May we make room for you
in the midst of the celebrations,
in the quiet moments,
and in the needs of those around us.
Where there is sadness, bring comfort.
Where there is uncertainty, bring hope.
Where there is loneliness, bring your presence.
Where there is joy, help us to give thanks.
And as we leave this place,
may the light of Christ go with us
into our homes, our families and our communities.
Come, Lord Jesus,
and make your home among us.
Amen.

And a blessing...
May the God of hope fill us with joy and peace as we trust in him.
May Christ walk with us through the week ahead,
and may the light of his presence shine through us wherever we go.
Amen.

*"It is the beautiful task of Advent to awaken in all of us
memories of goodness and thus to open doors of hope."
Pope Benedict XVI*