

## Trust

'Advent means a heart that is awake and ready, which does not let itself become bitter and deadened by hard blows but stays awake and aware of the free coming of the Lord God. That is why this free God must be met by a free person...who may well suffer hard blows but without going under.' (Fr. Alfred Delp)

Christmas invites us to welcome Jesus into the mangers of our lives. He alone can make a feast out of what frightens, even repulses us.

Gabriel, the scary angel of Annunciation in Luke 1:5-38, helps us here. How Zechariah and Mary respond to this intimidating creature (don't be fooled by the androgynous darling of religious art who whispers gently) blazes a trail for me when life announces something dreadful. Rather than seize up with control, I now invite Jesus into the mess. I try and trust that new life is growing in what might otherwise kill me.

Christmas is rife with ugly announcements for lovely people: the cancer diagnosis, parents whose son returns home as a 'daughter', the spouse who splits, a church split by an unchaste pastor, death threats from offended LGBT+ers...

Zechariah helps me a lot. His response is much closer to what mine might be. He's an old religious guy, guided and steadied by rules. Rigor mortis has set into any hint of womb-like elasticity. When Gabriel declares he will father the firebrand John the Baptist, he tries to mop himself off the floor by demanding a map, more knowledge, a strategy. 'How can I be sure of this?' he says. Thrown off, he tries to control the situation by insisting on a more logical prophecy. Like us, he demands of mystery what it cannot give.

Perhaps the wise old guy was a preacher who used words to control his world. Not for long. The angel gives him nine months to be still and listen to a voice other than his own. Gabriel mutes Zechariah as he awaits the Baptist--a humbling pregnancy for any priest! Yet rather than scorn Zechariah, I empathize with him. I too grasp for control when levelled by scary angels; noisy with intense, often indecent language, I lose my voice. But I don't lose the invitation to new life! I'm just chastened a little until I simmer down and can trust God's design in my distress.

Gabriel encounters Mary after Zechariah. Mind you, the angel's annunciation to her is far more challenging. Not only has God willed Mary to become a mother, He Himself will father the child. Yet this overwhelming prospect doesn't provoke a controlling response. Unlike Zechariah who grasps after facts, Mary counters a native fear with faith: 'Tell me more,' a response resonant with consent.

And trust. She leans into the mystery, content to grow in 'the love that surpasses knowledge' (Eph. 3:19) rather than flail for security in mere knowledge. Soon she will be filled with love's

fullness (v.20), our Savior, her Son, God's only, expanding in her until she can contain Him no more!

I love her simple answer to angel Gabriel: 'Be it to me as you said' (Lk. 1:38). Henri Nouwen paraphrases this beautifully: 'I don't know what all this means but I trust that good will come from it.'

May Mary's wisdom and humility become ours. A good goal for all the scary annunciations that await us in 2020? Spend less time grasping for security in vain things and lean longer into the mystery of divine mercy. I want to try and trust Jesus with every unsettling thing and so abide in peaceful love more than with alien passions like anxiety. Please join me.

'What transformed Mary into royalty is that she recognized God as a God of challenge. She experienced what it means to be torn away from all normal destinies and, thereby, to be caught up in new possibilities. She stands as a healing and helping source of strength, right in the middle of what no-one can know beforehand.' (Fr. Alfred Delp)

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