

December 20, 2020 | Journey worship service

THEME: Jubilee

TEXT: [Luke 1:26–38](#)

TITLE: Let It Be

By the Rev. Patrice Fowler-Searcy

We have reached the fifty-first Sunday in the year of 2020. A few more days, and this year of uncharted waters, unexpected and prolonged interruptions, and unprecedented life circumstances will come to a close. The year 2020 was supposed to be the year of perfect vision, a year of seeing everything clearly...and yet, it has been a year unlike any most of us have ever experienced or seen in our lifetime. 2020 is a year that can best be described as looking through a mirror darkly. There are shadows everywhere. Shadows of our plans, expectations, hopes, and dreams that were changed by the invasion of an unexpected virus that changed the world. Lives that have been uprooted, and destroyed by floods, fires, tornadoes, and other natural disasters. The stock market has fallen, recovered, and exceeded all expectations, while unemployment and financial ruin are pervasive. We have in pondered private, as well as expressed to others in conversation, how can this be?

One commentator states, “On the Sunday before Christmas, people are in the mood for miracles.” Truer words have never been spoken. We are not only in the mood for miracles this Sunday before Christmas, we also need miracles to reconcile this year. A miracle to reverse the death of millions of people. A miracle to reverse millions more who are infected by or have recovered from Covid-19. We need a miracle to restore employment and livelihoods; a miracle to restore bank accounts, and utilities, and housing, and put food on the table; a miracle to restore emotional, mental, and physical health. We need a miracle to restore our hope, faith, and joy.

The Lukan account of the annunciation to Mary, an ordinary young woman, betrothed to be married, living in Nazareth of Galilee, was indeed a miraculous occurrence. Gabriel, a messenger of the Lord, shows up to disrupt Mary’s life, with a simple announcement, “Mary, favored one. The Lord is with you.” Mary’s reaction is surprise, she is perplexed, she wonders what type of greeting this is, and she is afraid. Gabriel continues, do not be afraid, once again assuring her that she has found favor with God. I suspect that by the time Gabriel finished telling Mary that she would conceive a son, she did not feel favored. It would have been a disgrace and possibly grounds for death by stoning to be a betrothed, young Jewish woman and pregnant in Palestine. Joseph, to whom she was betrothed to marry, could have divorced, and left her. But God had other plans for Mary, plans that she obviously could not imagine, fathom, or see.

Now, this is a familiar story, so we know that Gabriel tells Mary that she will conceive a son, who will be called the Son of the Most High, God will give him the throne of David, he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will have no end. But how can this be, for Mary is a virgin?

How can this be? We have been asking that question all year? How can this be that a mere trip outside of our homes can potentially have deadly consequences? How can this be that too many people are unemployed, are on the brink of homelessness, utility disconnections, and are hungry? How can this be that people with wealth are getting richer, while every day working people are struggling financially? How can this be that some federal legislators and senators are more concerned about bailing out major, billion-dollar companies and businesses but ignore or disregard the needs of local stores and restaurants?

Gabriel responds to Mary, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore, the child will be holy; he will be the Son of God.” My intention is not to debate the miracle of the Virgin birth...there are some things of God that are too high for our understanding. But what I will say is that God found favor in an ordinary, young woman and appointed her to do an extraordinary thing—to conceive and birth the Son of God, the redeemer of humanity. For as Gabriel professed, nothing is impossible with God.

Being of Jewish descent, Mary knew the stories of old that tell of the impossible ways God moved in the lives of the Jewish people. She knew that God freed the Israelites from bondage, held back the Red Sea that they might escape from the Egyptian army, fed, clothed, and kept them in the wilderness, and gave them the Promised Land, the land of milk and honey. Mary knew that God is a God of the impossible and the improbable, a miracle worker and a way-maker. Mary knew that God had fought battles, raised up shepherds to fight giants and the lowly had become king, made prophets out of everyday men and women, and assigned a woman to lead men into a victorious battle and render judgements under trees. What Mary did not know was that she would be included in God’s story.

Nothing is impossible with God. Those are words to live by as we ponder the year 2020, all that we have lost, all that many have suffered, all that may be forever changed. In the year of perfect vision and insight, it may appear that we are all just wandering in the dark. And yet, in this year of darkness, devastation, destruction, and death, there are points of light—the essential workers who persevere and go to work every day in hospitals and clinics to minister to the physical and emotional needs of the sick and infirmed, clean rooms, prepare food, transport patients, administer medical care, perform surgery and lab work, hold hands, whisper prayers, and make phone calls to families that may hear the voice of their sick relative or their share their good-byes. The essential workers who fill our prescriptions, restock shelves, wait on and check people out of grocery lines, clean stores and sanitize carts. They are all points of light. The essential workers who collect our trash, deliver our mail, drive buses, Ubers, Door Dash, and other delivery services. The essential workers at ELPC, other churches, organizations, and agencies who greet us, take our temperatures, clean, and sanitize the building that we might be safe. All points of light!

This year of perfect vision has transformed each of you into points of light, ordinary people who have done extraordinary things—donated food and money that our

neighbors might eat, rents and utilities might be paid; helped people living in areas of natural disasters; donated materials and time making and distributing masks; showed up to protest the murder of far too many people of color by the people sworn to protect and serve; called members of our congregation to ensure they know they are not alone; participated in difficult conversations about racism, disparities based on skin color, and White privilege; and gave generously that one hundred children will have a bright Christmas.

In my estimation, 2020 has still been a year of clear and perfect vision, as prayerfully, we all have seen what is truly important - being kind, merciful, and gracious, loving unconditionally, forgiving others as we have been forgiven, being a blessing as we have been blessed, recognizing the Spirit of God in others, no longer allowing definers that have separated us for far too long to have power over us. We see with perfect vision that putting our hope, trust and faith in God is what strengthens, guides, empowers, and gives us courage in the darkest of night, when we do not fully understand, when we feel we are not in control, and especially when we feel we are navigating blindly.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

“Even if our gospel is veiled or hidden, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’ sake. For it is the God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Paul continues, we may be afflicted in every way, but we are not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed (2 Cor. 4:3–6,8,9).

The writer of Luke describes Mary as favored, perplexed, thoughtful, and afraid. I dare say that this year, we have also experienced all these emotions and many more. We may be in the mood for miracles. However, on this fifty-first Sunday in 2020, we light the Advent candle of love, to remember that God so loved the world that God gave the only, begotten Son; Jesus the Christ, the Good News, the light of the world, who is, was, and always will be the miracle we await and yet, have already received.

Beloved, as we approach the close of a year unlike any other, may we echo Mary’s response to Gabriel and to God, “Here we are, servants of the Lord, let it be with us according to your word, as we know that with you Lord God, nothing is impossible. Let it be. Amen.