

Bishop Laurie Haller
Christmas 2021

Grace and peace to each one of you during this season of Advent. As we approach the holy night of Christmas Eve, I am reminded of Mary's song in the first chapter of the gospel of Luke.

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." ²⁹ But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² He 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. ³³ He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴ Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵ The 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. ³⁶ And 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. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸ Then 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. **This is the world of God of the people of God.**

Can you imagine how Mary felt that day when the angel Gabriel appeared to her and said that she, of all people, would give birth to Jesus, God's very own son? I suspect she felt fear, amazement, wonder, and unworthiness, all at the same time. And how did Mary respond? She said, "Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

So, here you and I are, God's servants in this world, a world that desperately needs to hear the angels sing words of joy, hope, and love through us. In the midst of a pandemic that is still ongoing; communities struggling with poverty; and a world where racism continues to foster injustice and oppression and create barriers; here we are, God's servants, called to share the love of Jesus with others. As with Mary, God also wants to do great things through you and me.

How can you make a difference right now? How can you embody the good news of Jesus Christ to others? Maybe you can take a plate of homemade Christmas cookies to new neighbors or to a family that has experienced loss. Perhaps you can visit an elderly neighbor who is shut-in, invite family members to

contribute to a non-profit agency in your town, or offer to babysit for a young couple who never has a chance to get away. Can you take the time to get to know the children and youth in your church?

Remembering that Jesus, Mary, and Joseph were refugees, how can you reach out to a refugee family in your area? How might God be calling you to become involved in making your local community a better place for all to live, work, and serve? Whom do you plan to invite to Christmas Eve services? Will you dare to say, "Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your Word."

Let us pray. Mary, Mary, what you gonna name that baby? What you gonna call that holy baby? Hungry and poor, we need someone to save us; Why don't you call him Savior? Sh! Let's all call him Savior! Mary, Mary, what you gonna name that baby? What you gonna call that holy baby?

May the joy of Advent and Christmas be yours. Amen.