

A Time of Prayer: Listen

December Edition

LISTENING FOR DIVINE SPARKS

OPENING PRAYER

Creator God, we await the Incarnation of your beloved Jesus with wonder and thanksgiving and are inspired by Mary's "yes" to your divine will. Help us through your grace to hear and understand how you wish us to be sent into your world to support your loving action in our communities and in our diocese. We ask this in the name of the infant, Emmanuel, our Saviour. Amen.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

Luke 1:26-38

| <i>New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised (NRSVA)</i> | <i>The Message (MSG)</i> |
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| <p>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, favoured 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 favour 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 for ever, 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.</p> | <p>26-28 In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to the Galilean village of Nazareth to a virgin engaged to be married to a man descended from David. His name was Joseph, and the virgin's name, Mary. Upon entering, Gabriel greeted her: "Good morning! You're beautiful with God's beauty, Beautiful inside and out! God be with you." 29-33 She was thoroughly shaken, wondering what was behind a greeting like that. But the angel assured her, "Mary, you have nothing to fear. God has a surprise for you: You will become pregnant and give birth to a son and call his name Jesus. He will be great, be called 'Son of the Highest'. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David; He will rule Jacob's house forever— no end, ever, to his kingdom." 34 Mary said to the angel, "But how? I've never slept with a man." 35 The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, the power of the Highest hover over you; Therefore, the child you bring to birth will be called Holy, Son of God." 36-38 "And did you know that your cousin Elizabeth conceived a son, old as she is? Everyone called her barren, and here she is six months pregnant! Nothing, you see, is impossible with God." And Mary said, "Yes, I see it all now: I'm the Lord's maid, ready to serve. Let it be with me just as you say." Then the angel left her.</p> |



LECTIO DIVINA

Ask someone to read the NRSVA translation of the passage aloud.

Allow for several minutes of silence as each bible study participant contemplates the passage, noticing which word(s), sentence(s), idea(s) or feeling(s) catch their attention. The group can decide how long the period of silence should last, but in the *Lectio Divina* tradition, it is substantial (a minimum of 3-5 minutes is suggested, perhaps working up to a longer interlude).

Invite participants to briefly share with one another those word(s), phrase(s), idea(s) or feeling(s) stirring them. Encourage participants to avoid interpreting or expanding on them at this time, but simply to state them out loud. Explain that time for reflection and discussion will follow later in the prayer time.

Have another person read the MSG translation of the passage aloud, followed by a second period of silence and invite participants to share again. The same or different word(s), phrase(s), idea(s) or feeling(s) may emerge.

Have a third person re-read the NRSVA version aloud again, followed by a final period of silence and invite participants to reflect on what they think is being drawn to their attention by the Holy Spirit. There are no right or wrong answers. It might be helpful to consider the following questions:

- o What is God saying to me about how I should say 'yes'?*
- o What is the 'yes' we are called to say to the community around us?*
- o What is God saying to our congregation and our diocesan church through this passage today?*

CLOSING PRAYERS

Holy God, we listen for your divine sparks in our midst. As Jesus is sent by you to bring the good news of your kingdom to all people and urge us to turn to you, help us understand how you wish our parish and diocese to be sent into the communities around us. Show us the people to whom we should go, the path we should travel, and enable us through your grace to bring them to know Jesus, who is "God with us". We ask this in the name of your beloved Son, **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen.



CAPTURING THE DIVINE SPARKS KINDLED

- Consider whether there were sparks kindled during this prayer session. Ask a participant to write down any important ideas that emerged and ensure that there is group consensus around what is captured.
- Who do these sparks need to be shared with at this time? Find a way to share the insights gained with those who need to hear them.

ADDITIONAL BIBLE STUDY RESOURCES

- Mark Allan Powell writes, “[Mary] is not blessed because she is going to be the physical mother of Jesus, but because she believed God’s word. So, whatever blessing accrues to Mary is one we all can share.” Read the brief commentary here:
<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/fourth-sunday-of-advent-2/commentary-on-luke-126-38-3>
- Karoline Lewis writes, “Somehow, somehow, a sermon on this text will negotiate the radical transformation in only three short verses, from peasant girl to prophet, from Mary to mother of God, from denial to discipleship.” Read the brief commentary here:
<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/fourth-sunday-of-advent-2/commentary-on-luke-126-38>