

B Advent 4 2017

How many saw this year's Christmas program this year? Yea I was guessing that many of our Saturday-nighters would have made it to A Sunday Morning program. It was darling of course. All of the children wore their pajamas and they told the story of Jesus' birth by using an adapted version of The night before Christmas... Over their pajama's they wore the costumes of, Mary and Joseph shepherds, angels and even a mouse.

The tradition of the Sunday School program goes way back. How many of you were in a Christmas program at some point?

Well are a small group this evening. Let's take a few moments and turn to your neighbor and tell them what part you remember playing in a program...and did you have a job to do as that Character...maybe you carried a present to lay at the manger, maybe you had lift up a star, sing a solo or recite a memory verse. Just a few seconds here...  
*Engage the congregation about their parts and experiences And then talk a few moments about the jobs of each character.i.e. Mary: give birth; Joseph: stay faithful; Donkey; Carry the family to Bethlehem,; the Shepherds: Come and see and go and tell; Kings: bring gifts; Angel: messengers of God.*

It is good for children to be in programs because it helps them not only learn the story but to feel a part of the story. Since most of you didn't get to see a Christmas program this year, I thought I would show you one I found on youtube.

And because we just lit the Angel's candle, pay special attention to the angel's role.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-s56Xa\\_C54I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-s56Xa_C54I)  
Christmas story; kids perspective.

There are lots of these little retellings of the nativity story but I especially liked this one because it brings the story of Jesus to today. It's not just a story that happened long ago but speaks to us today.

Walter Brueggeman, one of my favorite biblical theologians once challenged a group of preachers by saying, "***Few of our people imagine God to be an active character in the story of their lives.***" (Favored Ones by David Lose-Craft of Preaching-Workingpreacher.com 12/11/11)

I am sad to say, I think he is right. Lots of people believe in God, a distant, impersonal God that has something to do with creation and answering prayer.

And God is part of creation and does listen to our prayers but God also gets involved. David Lose wrote in Working Preacher about this kind of God and I would like to share a bit of what he said:

*"God does things, all kinds of things—great and small, mighty, mundane or miraculous, God is constantly at work. More than that God regularly uses other people to point out and tell about what God is doing. Take today's gospel reading, for instance, where the angel Gabriel bursts unexpectedly into the life of an unsuspecting teenage girl*

*named Mary to tell her that she had found favor of God and will conceive, carry and bear the Son of God."*

Now we can only imagine what she felt! And though she is painted and portrayed as a woman of unflinching faith, she was also human.

As I was thinking about Mary (and Joseph's) predicament, I remembered hearing somewhere that Kubler Ross's 5 stages of grief **Denial, Anger, Depression Bargaining, Acceptance** can be applied to any critical or surprising situation.

And if we listen carefully to Mary's story we will notice that it is only after a roller-coaster of dismay and Gabriel's affirmation and promise (Lose) that she is a favored one with a holy role to play and a holy job to do.

So the question for us is whether we believe that God is finished with interrupting people's lives?

Has God stopped calling us to do courageous, faithful things.

Could God use us to change the world?

Or what about the folks around us here today? Could God use them.

When I look at the Christmas story and the story of Jesus death and resurrection, In faith I answer those questions with Of course God can and does use us.

No matter what our circumstances God can interrupt our lives and give us a role to play and a job to do.

So, I have included in your bulletin a 2-sided insert. I invite you to take it out and to use a little imagination and thought and answer the question on the front:

Below was suggested by David Lose in Working Preacher (ibid)

**I am favored by God. Indeed, God wants to do great things through me.**

**One of those things may be:**  
*During this time go out and put on angel halo and wings and come back in:*

**Because the God of Mary and Jesus is still active, I believe God is still at work in the world, even through me. Therefore, though I do not always understand how and why God is at work, I can still answer, "Here am I, a servant of the Lord. Let it be with me according to your world."**

**RESPONSIVE READING**

**Angel: "Greetings, favored ones. The Lord is with you and intends to do great things through you.**

**Congregation: "How can this be? We are ordinary, everyday people."**

**Angel: "Yet you have found favor through God, and the Holy Spirit will come upon you, guide you, and work through you to care for this world and people God loves so much. For nothing is impossible with God.**

**Congregation: "Here am I, a servant**

This is the Good News of the Gospel