

Advent 4 2023

Isn't it Advent? Why are we reading about Annunciation? It's not Lent. Not March 25th. Shouldn't we be looking ahead toward Christmas, the Nativity. And this year it's not even a week ahead but tomorrow.

These were my initial reactions when I looked at the readings for today.

But stop and consider that these are not individual unrelated events. They are part of the whole story of Jesus and Mary. Without the annunciation there would be no nativity or anything that followed.

We can go back to the Old Testament – to Isaiah – to hear the predictions of one who will come – one born of a virgin – one who will be called Emmanuel. By the time Gabriel comes to Mary, the story is well underway. She joins it at that point but that was not the beginning nor is it the end. Just one chapter along the way.

Let me share a wonderful writing by William Stafford that deals with continuity.

The Way It Is

There's a thread you follow. It goes among
things that change. But it doesn't change.
People wonder about what you are pursuing.
You have to explain about the thread.
But it is hard for others to see.
While you hold it you can't get lost.
Tragedies happen; people get hurt
or die; and you suffer and get old.
Nothing you do can stop time's unfolding.
You don't ever let go of the thread

William Stafford ~

At the annunciation, Mary picks up the thread. She most likely had the thread beforehand but not known it. She was not an idle choice for her role in the events to come but one chosen for a reason.

There were many stops along her journey – the journey that would take her to Bethlehem and beyond. But first, Gabriel's visit. His announcement about Elizabeth. Her journey to visit Elizabeth. John's leaping in the womb. Elizabeth's realization about the baby Mary was carrying. The birth of John. The trip to Bethlehem, the rough accommodations in the stable, the birth, the angels, the shepherds, stars brighter than ever before. Shepherds, animals standing watch, the curious coming to see what was happening. Magi arriving from the east bearing gifts. These all hung together with that one golden thread.

The thread didn't break or come to an end after Bethlehem. The flight into Egypt, the escape from Herod, the presentation in the temple. All the way to the cross and beyond. The resurrection, the ascension. Mary never lost her faith – never lost the thread that had held together all the events of her life and Jesus' life.

We all have a thread. You may lose track of it – you may drop it – others may question it or not understand. It is possible to doubt the thread and where it is leading. It asks us to be faithful. You know in your heart and in your being that God is calling you and leading you. No matter what, it is always there. Like Mary, stay true. Don't let go.