



Being real

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Advent 4

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2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16

Romans 16:25-27

Luke 1:26-38

'Come Lord Jesus'. Come to us this day through your Word. Amen.

We've journeyed through Advent so far with three themes:

- **being open** (open to God and to others);
- **being gathered** (gathered now, to pray and love one another; and gathered in the fullness of time with God when all of creation is renewed)
- **being sent** (sent in the power of the Spirit, to work and give praise to God's glory).

Today, the fourth Sunday of Advent, I'd like us to focus not on what we might "do" in Advent, but on *how we are* before God - on **being real**.

We've just heard the story of the angel visiting Mary with the news that she would bear God's Son. We often speak of Mary saying Yes to God – yes to the invitation to be the God-bearer. But someone asked me recently: "What is it that Mary said yes to? I thought she just got told what was going to happen?"

And one way of reading that passage this morning is to say, well yes, the angel came and said: 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for God has been gracious to you; you will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus.

The angel didn't say: "Mary – what do you think? I know this sounds weird, and seems impossible to you, and it might be a bit hard trying to explain it all to

Joseph and everyone else... but can you get back to me in a couple of days and let me know if you're willing to take this on...?"!

The angel may not have asked Mary a question, but Mary *did* give an answer, and that answer was Yes. She gave a response which indicated her willingness to agree that in some mysterious way she would be the bearer of God's Good News.

Mary's yes was all about offering her real self and her deepest being to God. Maybe she had misgivings, maybe she had doubts, maybe she was completely overawed by the mystery of all this. Yet her response was "*I am the Lord's servant, may it be as you have said.*"

Mary said yes because a yes would enable the fullest possible expression of her relationship with God.

Can we relate to that? Can we think of times when an opportunity has presented itself, and we might sense God saying: "I'd like you to do this...." It's not so much a question, as a statement. And we respond. We consider and discern and pray, and at some point we might say: Yes.

A yes means we enter into God's invitation, like Mary, to be in relationship with God. A yes means we are willing to let God in to our reality. And that reality means not only the nice, joyous, pious bits, but the messy, chaotic, doubting, scary bits that make us real and human and fragile.

So how does this relate to our Advent journey? Part of the nativity story we will tell in Christmas and Epiphany features the wise men from the East who brought gifts to the infant Christ-child. The carol 'In the Bleak Mid-Winter' asks:

*What can I give him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
if I were a Wise Man, I would do my part;
yet what I can I give him: give my heart.*

When we say "Come Lord Jesus" this Advent, I'd like to suggest that's shorthand for:

“Come to me Lord Jesus; come to me in both your humility and your glory; and I offer you my whole self, my real self, so that you can shine your light in my darkest, messiest places to reveal promise, growth, hope and new beginnings.”

I conclude with a story by Joy Cowley, that speaks into this.

It's called *The Giving*.



Advent