

December 14th, 2025

Luke 1:26-29 “We Are Called Forward” Advent 3

I think it's cute when folks tell me about how confident I am when I preach. I'm happy that it *seems* like I'm confident because most of the time I'm rather anxious. But according to my old clergy mentor Jack Musik, that's a *good* thing. He said if I'm not at least a *little* nervous, I've lost touch with the awesome responsibility of preaching the Good News. I'll admit, some occasions are easier than others. When I'm preaching here on a Sunday morning, my heart rate hovers around 85 beats a minute which is about 10 beats per minute more than my average rate. Now, on Sundays when I start the morning off with major obstacles like computers not booting up, my heart rate jumps up a few notches and I have to do some breathing exercises before I get up in front of people. But I manage to maintain the *appearance* of not being nervous.

My radio show is different. If I'm pre-recording, as we typically do, it's akin to preaching to you all. However, when I'm doing a live air interview it's harder because I don't have the luxury of editing mistakes in post-production. But the worst is when I'm speaking to an unfamiliar crowd. That's when my Apple watch starts buzzing and says, “Your heart rate is over 100 BPM,

would you like to record a workout?” Sure, why not? Jack also taught me the “fake it ‘til you make it” principle. So yes, thank you for the compliments regarding my confidence. I *am* confident in my ability to give the *appearance* of being calm, but that’s a skill that I’ve developed over the years, not a natural state of being.

Which brings me to the prophet Jeremiah, the subject of the first passage Kevin read this morning. A few weeks ago, we read about Isaiah who, upon being called as a prophet by God enthusiastically said, “Here I am, Lord. Send me.” Here’s where I want to point out that Isaiah’s reaction is the exception, not the rule. Most people in the Bible are reluctant to answer God’s call. Even Moses, who is one of the key figures in Judaism and Christianity said, “But suppose they do not believe me or listen to me” when God called him. Then he started making excuses -- “O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.” When God called Jeremiah to be a prophet to the nations, his response was, “Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.”

This was true! Even though there’s no mention of *exactly* how old Jeremiah was, many Biblical scholars guess that he was around 14 years old. Can you imagine this? How many of you as a junior-high age kid would have felt

confident about being a “prophet to the nations?” You know that feeling you have when you experience a rush that starts in your chest and ends in your head? That’s your adrenal glands saying, “Danger! It’s time to be on guard” which causes the body to increase its heart rate and makes you hyper-aware. That’s a fear reaction. And our theme for this advent season is hope over fear.

Now let’s turn to our second scripture. You may be thinking, “*It’s about time—three weeks into Advent and we’re finally talking about Mary and Jesus.*” And you’d be right. Mary was young, unmarried, and living under the weight of Jewish law as enforced by King Herod during Roman occupation. To be told—without warning—that she would bear a child by divine initiative wasn’t just a spiritual surprise; it was a profound social and bodily risk. Her “yes,” then, can’t be read as simplistic or naïve. It emerges from vulnerability, trust, and a deep instinct for survival. That’s why it matters that Mary asks a question. “How can this be?” *isn’t* an expression of doubt—it’s an act of agency. She wants understanding before she gives consent. And here’s the important part: Gabriel does not rebuke her. Instead, he offers a promise. “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and you will be *overshadowed*.” In this context, that word means sheltered. There’s no hint of coercion here. This is about protection, not domination. Still, Mary’s consent remains essential. She listens, she considers the

impossible, and then she responds with courage: “*Let it be with me according to your word.*”

This isn’t fear *erased*, it’s fear *acknowledged* and worked through. It’s a choice made with trembling faith. Now, see how Jeremiah’s story resonates with Mary’s? Jeremiah is afraid that he’s too young to speak for God. Answering this call will come at a cost. But he hears God’s divine promise-- “Do not be afraid . . . I am with you.” What connects Jeremiah and Mary is not a *lack* of fear, but a deep, trembling resolve to move forward anyway. Not with certainty, but with open hands and the courage to say yes, even in the unknown.

Neither Mary nor Jeremiah embody any kind of spectacular boldness. Their strength lies in quiet resolve—in the holy, hesitant “yes” that dares to trust. This week’s texts remind us that God’s call often comes when we’re just trying to survive. Mary, like so many other young women in that time in history, was likely just trying to avoid shame, invisibility and potentially violence. Survival mode leaves little space for dreaming let alone imagining oneself as “blessed among women.” And yet God’s call interrupts that quiet survival—not to exploit it, but to awaken her to a fuller, riskier, more radiant self. This call is *not* without cost. Mary’s “yes” will likely bring silence, estrangement, and pain. She will

not only bear the Christ child, but also the burden of suspicion, poverty, and loneliness. Still, she says yes.

In our time and place, we're often taught that fear is failure—something to silence or push through. But this Advent, we're invited to see fear as information. Some fear protects us, but some fear is the threshold of transformation—the fear that comes when we are on the edge of saying yes to God. It's the fear that signals deep vulnerability, and deep possibility. I've noticed lately that the dominant expression of Christianity defines courage in loud, bold, heroic and certain terms. But Mary and Jeremiah model a different sort of courage: The courage to ask questions, to hesitate, to need more time, and take just one uncertain step. Most importantly, they are told that they don't walk alone. After her yes, Mary runs to her cousin Elizabeth who meets her with joy and affirmation: "Blessed are you among women!" (Luke 1:42). Elizabeth provides Mary with confirmation and community. *This* is part of the calling too. We are not meant to walk forward alone. God calls us not only to action, but to become fully whole and fully ourselves. Fear doesn't disqualify us—it's just part of the process. And God promises to walk with us, every step of the way.

Here are your questions for the week -

What fear are you carrying?

What invitation are you resisting because you feel incapable?

What would it mean to say yes—not fearlessly, but faithfully?

Friends, Advent isn't the season of having it all together. It's the season of daring to say "yes" even when our hearts are racing. Mary and Jeremiah remind us that courage isn't loud—it's faithful. And God meets us there, calling us forward step by step, until hope outweighs fear. Then Mary's words can become our own: "Let it be with me."