

Advent, Day 18
Read Luke 1:26-38

Wednesday, December 19

"Mary said, 'I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word.'"

Luke 1:38

EXPECTATION

I am not a woman. Therefore my personal experience of what it means to be a woman expecting a child can only be stated from an observational point of view. (Though I like to imagine that I was fairly empathetic with my wife during those nine months.)

The first signs must, I am sure, be cause for concern. Even if it's something you've been trying to make happen for some time, that moment of truth must be a moment of anxiety. If it's something you've wanted, there is always the possibility that your attempt has failed yet once again. If it's completely unexpected, the fear might be even greater.

I do not think it is an accident that the first words out of the angel's mouth are:

"Don't be afraid!"

Don't be afraid. What's happening to you is part of the plan of God. Don't be afraid. What you are feeling is normal and necessary for survival. Don't be afraid, everything is going to be all right.

After the fear usually comes the excitement. Starting to get things ready. Being aware of changes taking place in your body. Being amazed at the miracle that is taking place inside you. Growing there, where you cannot see, but can certainly feel, is another human being. The result of love shared. The cause for your concern and your care and your love.

Animals prepare for birth by instinct. We don't know if animals feel anything more than the need to procreate in order to insure the continuation of the species. But humans have the added dimension to their preparation of being able to think about it and to imagine. So human beings prepare on a much grander scale.

There might be pictures taken while the baby is still in the womb. There is the decision whether to know ahead of time the sex of the baby and make preparations in accordance. There will be baby showers and announcements and getting special space ready to receive a new human being. There is also all the worry that goes along with it.

Will I have what it takes to be a good mother? What kind of person will they turn out to be? Will my baby be healthy? If not, will I be able to handle whatever is necessary to give them a good life?

The self-conversation probably doesn't stop from the moment you become aware of the new person inside, until he or she emerges from the womb. Then a whole new set of questions present themselves, and new fears take over, and new joys present themselves.

Such an ordinary thing, the birth of a child.

Such an extraordinary and amazing thing, the miracle of birth.

There is that line in Psalm 139 that speaks to the wonder of it all.

"I praise you, O God, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

What an amazing thing for God to do. To enter into our lives in such an ordinary way. To be part of a process that seems so mundane.

It's one of those things that, when you stop to think about it, leaves you standing mouth-open in awe.

You just never know what to expect from a God like that.