

Advent 4 (B). December 24, 2017. Luke 1:26-38.

Back on the first Sunday of Advent, at the beginning of December, our first reading was from the prophet Isaiah. And the prophet pleaded with God: “Oh that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence . . . to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence!” He went on to describe how the bad guys were winning, the good guys were getting killed, and those who had remained faithful were being made to look like fools. And so in the prophet’s mind it will take something extraordinary to restore the world and save the righteous. It will take rending open the heavens in a spectacular show of might.

I am recalling this first reading of Advent because today, with the last reading of Advent, we get an answer. It is “no.” Well, maybe it’s just a touch more complicated than that. God will save the world, God will come down, but not to make the mountains quake and the nations tremble. God comes instead to a manger, as a child, within an ordinary poor working family. Even more than that, in today’s gospel God comes not as conquering king tearing open the firmament, but almost as a supplicant to a lowly young woman.

Mary has no place in the world. She is not part of some powerful family, or even a powerful nation. As a young woman in this culture, her place will be decided by her husband, and she doesn’t even have one of those yet. She is an insignificant young woman from a conquered people. A disempowered member of a disempowered people. And God has a think and says, “Let’s ask her if she’ll agree to be the way we save all of creation.” Instead of ripping open the sky and setting the earth atremble, God comes gently to ask. And Mary our mother in the faith says “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” And so God sets about restoring all of creation through a birth and a family and a man and a group of friends.

Friends I’m recounting all of this today because we are still echoing Isaiah. “God, can’t you see that the bad guys are winning? Get down here and fix this mess! If you’d only come, they’d have no choice but to behave!” And God continues to come round to us, whispering gently “Will you, will you, will you join me as I save the world?” The divine project of the Annunciation is still ongoing. God is still coming gently and inviting us, even little insignificant us, to participate in the restoration of the world. Not through miracles, but through love, through sharing, through speaking the truth at risk to ourselves, through hospitality to the stranger and food for the hungry. God still saves the world not through thunder, but through the quiet free assent of the ordinary beloved people of God. Amen.