

---

## *A Pregnant Paradox to Ponder*

**A sermon by the Rev. Canon Lauren Holder  
Advent 4 – Year B**

Greetings favored ones! It is good to be with you this morning. It is good to be with you during this Advent season as we prepare and hope and wonder and wait. And yet, I am feeling a deep longing—longing to be looking at your faces rather than this camera. Longing to sing with abandon in worship. Longing to shake hands and exchange hugs and let kids tug at my cope on the way to Sunday School and Coffee Hour. It is good to be with you this morning, and I long for something more.

It's a bit of a paradox, isn't it?

I have been thinking a lot about paradoxes lately. Partly because I feel like that's where we live right now—in a paradox. I am seeing my husband and kids more than ever! But I don't know when I'll see my parents and siblings next—and I grieve each time a planned gathering gets postponed. I am home more! And yet I am less present to my family and have less time for myself. Some of us may be working more while getting paid less. We may be connecting more while feeling more disconnected than ever. Even a child is familiar with paradox: shouting, "Leave me alone!" with her words and body language, while her eyes shout, "Please love me!"

I looked up various definitions of paradox and was struck by this one: "A thing involving contradictory yet interrelated elements that exist simultaneously and persist over time."<sup>[1]</sup>

It does feel like the paradoxes we bump up against these days have a knack for persisting over time.

Some of the most timeless paradoxes are found in our Holy Scriptures, including today's story of an angel named Gabriel visiting a young teenager named Mary, announcing to her this strange—if not terrifying—news: that she would be pregnant, carry the Son of God around in her womb, give birth, and name the child Jesus, whose kingdom would reign forever.

Note that Gabriel does not ask Mary if this is ok. He's not here to deliver a request from God, but to proclaim a truth that is already taking shape. We don't always get to choose the truth, but we can accept it, which is what Mary does when she identifies herself as a servant of the Lord and says, "Let it be."

Do you see the paradox there? The word "servant" translated from the Greek word "*doulos*" is more traditionally and perhaps accurately translated as "slave." Mary calls herself a slave to the Lord. She belongs to God. There's a powerlessness and lack of choice inherent in the relationship she describes—and yet, she does choose! She chooses to speak! To an angel! She has to pause and think, yes, but then she speaks up and says, "Let it be."

It is the paradox of powerlessness and choice. Of the Infinite conceiving something new with the finite. Of God incarnate. Conceiving the very person of Jesus—fully divine and fully human. God on high—the most powerful sovereign being beyond our comprehension—making Godself so vulnerable as to inhabit a womb and nurse at the breast of brave, obedient, bold, humble young woman.

I actually laughed when I read God's words to David in our reading from 2 Samuel, "You want to build me a house? Me, God, a house?" And then where does God choose to dwell instead? A womb. A uterus. In a body. To become a body. And save the world. My guess is King David did not see that coming.

What I'm finding in this sacred story is that paradox is where transformation and new life takes place.

And while I'm encouraged by that truth—I'm encouraged by the idea that this current paradox filled season that "persists over time" is fertile ground for new life... I'm also discouraged by the discomfort and fatigue that accompanies it.

Oh, it is a wondrous and uncomfortable thing to be pregnant with possibility. The morning sickness... waking up with a pit in your stomach. The back pain... struggling to stand up when it feels like the world wants to bring you down. The stretch marks... visible scars we see in our lives from growing more than we thought possible. We feel all of it when we let God transform us. We feel all of it when we carry around new life growing larger every day.

And yet I think we sometimes forget to care for ourselves the way a pregnant woman cares for her body as a vehicle for new life. If we really truly believed that God had taken up residence in our very being—dwelling in us while creating new life in us—maybe we'd eat better foods and go to bed earlier or take more naps. Maybe we'd say no to the things we knew would sap the energy we need to care for this growing life within us. Maybe we wouldn't be as hard on ourselves because we would daily remember the miracle of life taking up residence in our very bodies. Maybe we would pray more, whispering the name of our hope embodied, of love incarnate—Emmanuel: God with us.

My prayer this Advent is that we would see in ourselves what God sees in us. That we would cradle that truth or that dream, carrying it in our most tender places with our most tender loving care. That we would be gentle with ourselves as we are transformed to make room for this new life to grow and grow until it can be contained no longer and is finally birthed into this world, still needing to be nursed, but ready to be known and loved by all.

Imagine it, friends. Imagine the angel Gabriel coming to you with a message from the God who lovingly created you:

"Greetings, favored ones! The Lord is with you. You look confused—do not be afraid, friends, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your inner most being and bear a new reality, and you will name it Love. And it will be great! And there will be no end to this love. How? The Holy Spirit will come to you and swirl around you and abide with you, so that your love will be holy, pointing to the glory of God. For nothing is impossible with God."

Ponder it. Question it. Wrestle with it. How will you respond? Are you ready to say, "Here I am?" Can you utter the words, "Let it be?" Will you accept the discomfort and loss that comes with carrying God's dream for you in your womb until it is formed and healthy enough to be born. Will you let it be so that you can simultaneously care for this new life while letting it go, remembering that it has always and will always belong to God?

Let us ponder this in our hearts, friends. Let us be thoughtful and mindful and intentional in caring for ourselves as if we were carrying love incarnate, Jesus, in our very bodies. God does not need a house—does not need Cathedral walls and vaulted ceilings and beautiful windows and shined brass—God needs you. God chooses you. Your bodies, your souls, your hearts, your minds—that's where God chooses to dwell, to grow, to transform, be born. In you. Every day. The Lord is with you. Let it be.

[1] [https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/paradox#cite\\_note-1](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/paradox#cite_note-1)