

DECEMBER 16, 2020

# AGAPE FROM AFAR

*Adjusting to life amidst Coronavirus*

A WORD  
FROM  
PASTOR  
JILL

As a way to remain connected during this time apart, I will be putting together a weekly newsletter with a reflection based on the upcoming Sunday scripture passage. I hope that by taking a few moments to reflect on the Word of God and pray, we can feel grounded and connected to God and to one another during this uncertain time. *-Pastor Jill*



The scripture for this week is Luke 1:26-38. This text tells of the angel appearing to Mary to inform her that she is pregnant and the child will be holy. This well-known story is central to the Christmas story. Try to read the passage with new eyes this week, paying special attention to words or phrases you have not noticed before.

Reflect more on this passage on the following pages.



**Read the passage:**

**Luke 1:26-38**

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.



**Reflect:**

1. After Mary heard what was to happen from the angel, she responded, "How can this be?" What unexpected situations in your life have caused you to respond similarly?
2. Where do you see an "impossible" situation where God could provide a solution in order to make overcoming the impossible possible?
3. How can the season of Advent help us see what is possible and overcome our resistance to change?
4. What is this passage calling you to do today? This week?

**Pray:**

This story is so familiar, yet unbelievable to us, O God, that we have trouble identifying with Mary. Inspire us with the courage of Mary to respond to impossible odds with the words, "Let it be with me according to your word."

Amen.



In this time when we are not able to sing our favorite Christmas carols together, let us spend Advent looking at the history behind some of our favorite songs:

### **O Holy Night!**

**Truly He taught us to love one another  
His law is love and His gospel is peace  
Chains shall He break for the slave is our brother  
And in His name all oppression shall cease  
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we,  
Let all within us praise His holy name**

In 1843, a French poet and wine merchant named Placide Cappeau was commissioned to write a Christmas piece to celebrate the renovation of a church organ in his hometown. Cappeau was keen on the idea, even though he himself was an atheist. The music was supplied by a Jewish composer named Adolphe Adams and the song became a holiday hit in France in spite of — or maybe because of — its author’s socialist leanings.

When Church authorities got wind that the song was written by two non-Christians, they tried to have it — well, today we’d call it “being cancelled.” There was some tension around some of the lyrics, which had Cappeau’s justice-oriented bent. Verse three struck authorities as particularly activist, with lines like “Chains shall He break, for the slave is our brother” and “in His name, all oppression shall cease.” The song was blasted for “lack of musical taste” and “total absence of the spirit of religion.”

However, the carol traversed the ocean thanks to a Unitarian minister and musician named John Sullivan Dwight. Dwight was an abolitionist and in 1855, the movement to outlaw slavery was picking up steam in the North. Dwight took Cappeau’s song and translated the lyrics to english, renaming it “O Holy Night.” It became a favorite of Christian abolitionists —particularly that third verse — and has been a Christmas staple ever since, even if its revolutionary roots aren’t quite as well-known.

From: <https://www.relevantmagazine.com/culture/music/reminder-o-holy-night-started-out-as-an-abolitionist-anthem/>

What Pastor Jill is still **reading:**  
*I'm Still Here* by Austin Channing Brown

What Pastor Jill is **watching:**  
*Elf*

What Pastor Jill is **listening to:**  
Christmas Music Playlists



**Please reach out to a staff member if you need financial, emotional or spiritual assistance. As always, we are here to help!**

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