

Yes, Lord

Luke 1:5-25, 57-66

Lethbridge Mennonite Church

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So, the season of Advent is upon us.

As the season approached this year, the worship committee was wrestling with how we should approach the season this year. What theme would be appropriate? Which resources should we choose?

What would be useful for the good people of Lethbridge Mennonite Church as we try to tune our hearts to the coming of Christ to be among us once again, and as we strengthen our hope for his coming again in glory?

The Monday before we were going to decide on the Advent theme, I was sitting around the circle with the guys at the jail.

There were around five minutes left when I got a big question when a young man—a kid, really—raised his hand. His head had remained down for most of the hour. He looked shy, uncertain, afraid.

“Can I ask a question?” His voice was barely audible. The room was instantly silent. “Of course,” I said, nervously looking at my watch.

He paused, and then said, “How do I have faith?”

Whew, what a question. Where do you even begin? A thousand options popped into my head.

Start with the content of belief. No, start with basic trust. No, start the connection between belief and behaviour. No, start with human desire and longing for justice, truth, beauty.

No, say a prayer, read a story from the gospels...

I ended up scrambling to say something about all those things in the short time before the guard arrived. I'm not sure how much of it landed. I didn't feel good about my response. As he was walking out the door, I promised to come see him next week.

So, I did. And I had a bit of a plan in mind when I showed up the next Monday.

I decided to compare having faith to marriage.

As you may know, last Tuesday, Naomi and I celebrated our 30th wedding anniversary. I decided to do something super romantic and spend it with MCA pastors at a Faith Studies event at Camp Valaqua (we went away for an anniversary weekend a few weeks ago, lest you think we didn't celebrate adequately 😊).

At any rate, thirty years ago, two mostly clueless kids stood up in front of a whole bunch of people and said "I do" in response to a whole bunch of statements.

We promised to love each other whether we were sick or healthy, rich or poor, for better or worse as long as we both shall live.

We made these promises, obviously, having no idea what they might demand of us in the future.

We said "yes" to each other not having any real idea what that "yes" would entail. We just knew that we wanted to walk the road ahead together.

"Faith is kind of similar," I told my young friend. "It simply means saying yes to Jesus."

We don't know what this "yes" will entail. We don't know what it may demand of us, what it might ask us to sacrifice, how it might liberate us and lead us into the best possible version of ourselves.

We don't necessarily know all that we need to be saved from or saved for. We don't always know what we need to be healed from or how we might be instruments of healing for others.

We don't know what mountaintops we will ascend or what dark valleys we may be plunged into.

We don't know where will be led, what love may require of us, how the love of God might liberate and transform us.

We simply know that we want to walk with Jesus. And we have a desire to trust him with our lives.

"That's it," I said. Faith begins with a "yes." And it unfolds and expands from there.

I sat there expectantly. "Does that kind of make sense?" I asked.

He nodded slowly. "Yeah, I guess so..."

Which wasn't exactly the triumphant moment I was hoping for. But hey, we plant seeds and trust that they will grow. ☺

As it happened, one of the worship resources for Advent that we were considering when I had this conversation at the jail was called "The Power of Yes."

My conversation with the young man at the jail tipped our decision in this direction.

So, for the season of Advent this year, we're going to be looking at the "yeses" in and around the Christmas story. We're going to look at how John the Baptist said yes, how Joseph said yes, how Mary and the Shepherds and the Wise Men said "yes."

How God said yes. And says yes.

One "yes" can make set the course of a life, a story. The introduction to our resources puts it like this:

We come from a history of people who said yes. Throughout the story of the people of God, brave and faithful, everyday people said yes to God. In Advent, these yeses are even more significant.

What does it take to get to yes? Why does it matter? Why does it matter that we

believe this? **This is a story that we tell, that isn't just on a page or in ancient tales, but one that lives in our bones, and calls to us to say our own yes when we are called into what God is doing now.**

Amen.

So, we're going to explore the ways in which "yeses" matter in God's story and ours.

This series will take us from now until Epiphany Sunday (Jan 11) after which we will be embarking on our Faith Questions 2026 series (assuming I get a few questions ☺).

So, that's the road map for the next seven Sundays.

On this First Sunday of Advent, we are dropped into the story of an infertile couple who receive a surprise visitor!

It's a well-known story. The angel Gabriel appears to an old childless couple, the priest Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth.

"You will have a son," the angel says to Zechariah as he performs his duties in the temple. "A son in the spirit and the power of Elijah... to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

Well, that is some news!

And yet Zechariah's "yes"—if it can be called that—feels half-hearted. It's guarded, tentative. It wants some assurances. *How can I be sure of this?*

Despite being schooled in the history of his people, despite no doubt being familiar with the stories of Abraham and Sara and of Hannah and her baby Samuel, despite knowing that God specializes in surprise babies to signal a turn in his story... despite all this, Zechariah is skeptical.

And for his failure to trust in the promise of God, Zechariah is struck mute for 9 months—for the entire period of Elizabeth's pregnancy.

Zechariah's yes comes gradually, after a long period of silence and reflection, until it finally bursts forth in his prophetic song that concludes Luke 1 (we didn't have time to read it this morning):

And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;
for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,
⁷⁷ to give his people the knowledge of salvation
through the forgiveness of their sins,
⁷⁸ because of the tender mercy of our God,
by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven
⁷⁹ to shine on those living in darkness
and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the path of peace."

Elizabeth's "yes" looks a bit different. She gets no angelic visitation, no speech, no rebuke. Her "yes" is more immediate and trusting.

Upon conceiving, she simply says, "This is what the Lord has done for me."

You could say that Elizabeth's yes required less faith in that the evidence was already there. She was pregnant, after all! The miracle was undeniable.

But Elizabeth's "yes" still required faith. It still required naming the work of God in her life and aligning her will with God's.

In the end, their "yeses" converge when it comes to the boy's name. The angel Gabriel commanded that the boy should be called "John," even though that would not have been customary at the time.

The neighbours and relatives protest, but Elizabeth stands firm. "His name is John." And poor mute Zechariah is reduced to confirming this by writing it on a tablet. And his tongue is loosed.

Their "yes" to God's strange and unexpected work in their lives looked different and, in Zechariah's case, was a while in coming, but they got there in the end.

God obviously doesn't always show up with angels and grand pronouncements. But God is always breaking into the story—whether the big story of the cosmos or the smaller stories of our lives.

So, my question for each one of us as Advent 2025 begins is a very simple one.

Where might God be calling you to say “yes” to his work in your life?

Perhaps it is a “yes” to pressing on in faith and hope, despite suffering and pain.

Or a “yes” to wonder and delight in a world that has come to feel stale and dull.

For some, it might be a “yes” to God himself—to belief in a God that really does interrupt history and our stories with divine surprises—and not just God as a kind of placeholder for out ethics and values (Will Braun had an excellent editorial in the most recent *Canadian Mennonite* that talks about precisely this).

Maybe it's a “yes” to something God is asking of you. Some act of devotion or spiritual discipline or commitment or service to others that you have been avoiding, some concrete need that you sense God is asking you to meet.

For others, it could be a “yes” to working on a relationship that has fallen or is falling apart.

It might be a yes to love when fear comes more naturally.

It might be a yes to trust instead of trying to engineer our own future.

It might be a yes joy in place of weary cynicism.

It might be a yes that requires a no to an unhealthy and destructive path.

It might be a yes to forgiveness, extended or received.

It might be a yes to confident hope that Christ has not only come once but will come again to make right all that has gone wrong, to judge, heal, redeem and reclaim.

I don't know what God is asking you to say “yes” to this year.

But I do know that faith always involves taking a step from where we are, to cracking open the door, being open to possibility, surprise, newness. And it always involves a “yes.”

My prayer as we take our first steps of the Advent season is that God will show each one of us where he is calling us to follow.

And whether it takes time, and a bit of trial and error, like Zechariah or it looks more like the quiet, settled trust of Elizabeth...

I pray that that we would say “yes.”

Amen.

