

Come, Spirit of the living God, and take up your place our hearts.

God is always doing a new thing. We experience it. And the bible tells us:
*I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.* (Isaiah 43:19)
"But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins." Jesus said. (Luke 5:38-39)
But he added this: *And no one after drinking old wine desires new wine,
but says, "The old is good."*

Jesus knew that God is always doing a new thing, and we are often
so attached to the old we fail to see it, or even reject it when we do.
Until God makes it unmistakable.

God telling an elderly couple who have never been able to have children
that they will have a baby? That's a new thing.

God showing up to a girl in a Galilean village announcing that she would become
pregnant – without a man's help, yet; that she would bear a son who would
also be the son of God? That's a new thing. That's a crazy new thing.

But then this angel gives her a confirming detail – when God asks something big
of us there is always a confirming detail or two... he tells her that her aged cousin
Elizabeth is six months pregnant, though she's always been unable to conceive.
"For nothing is impossible with God."

So Mary hightails it to the hill country of Judea – itself a journey – to see Elizabeth.
Does she go to see if what the angel said was true?

Does she go to avoid the stares and gossip – and maybe stone-wielding mobs –
of her neighbors?

Does she go to avoid having to deal with her fiancé Joseph –
she has some 'splainin' to do.

This week for the first time I wondered where was her mother?

I wonder if Mary's parents had died, for there is no mention of them in the
bible, and it is curious indeed that she would have made this trip alone.

But we can tell that Mary is no ordinary young woman.

She is an amazing young woman full of humility and courage, a rare combination.

Right here at the heart of our story is a young woman, whom we today would consider still a girl – and she is the agent through whom God is revealed to human eyes. Imagine!

And she says yes! Imagine! And sees the good news in it. Imagine!

I'd never thought of the story of the Annunciation as an anthem of women's empowerment, but this fills me with energy.

I want to go out and tell every young girl I know: Look at this girl!

Look how calm and clear and powerful she is!

God chose a young girl for the greatest mission. She said yes. Girl power rocks!

Mary was invited to participate in God's plan in the most intimate way possible. But in a very real way, what is asked of Mary is also asked of us:

To make ourselves available to the new thing God is bringing into being.

To make a space within ourselves for grace, a space available to God-life.

To listen when God calls, or kicks, or nudges, and step out in faith, trusting that *"the one who calls you is faithful."*

When Mary says, "How?" Gabriel says, *"The Holy Spirit will come upon you."*

My friends, when God calls us, God provides.

God gives us the Holy Spirit –that is a promise, a promise that never fails.

And whenever the Holy Spirit comes upon us, we bear life, we bear fruit.

That's how we know the Holy Spirit: because there is good fruit.

And the fruit is always a part of God's mission to reclaim, restore and renew all of creation to wholeness in Christ.

That plan was begun and fulfilled in the fruit of Mary's womb:

our Savior Jesus, Emmanuel, God-with-us.

And God graciously invites us to share in Christ's work as Christ's body by the fruit we bear.

How about you? What inner nudges and urges, little kicks are you feeling?

Sometimes it's a big kick. Ed Harne and BC Eydtt have both for decades

been in pain about the suffering inflicted on the Palestinian people,

the steady and increasing deprivation of land, freedom, resources, dignity.

In the fourteen months since the policies of apartheid turned into full-blown

genocide, with young children the targets of sniper fire and communities

bombed to smithereens, they have been filled with passion to bring more

attention to this ongoing destruction and the racist ideology that perpetuates it.

What new thing will God bring about through them, through us?

And let's push this pregnancy metaphor a little further...

Just as a human embryo is the product of the union of two seeds, so this new life we bear is also the product of the union of two souls – ours and Christ's. That is our claim, that in baptism we are united with Christ; a new entity takes root, a life that grows and grows in us. It fills us, and is born in new ways every day. But unlike a real baby, this Christ-life in us is always being born, and always continuing to grow in us.

If we are Christ's body, the way he is seen in the world now, where are we to make him known?

What's the darkest place you know of? Are you called to bring Christ's light into it? Who's the most despairing person you know? The most cynical? The most hateful? How are you called to bear Christ's life to her? To him? How about family, co-workers, fellow rabble-rousers? Can we take our faith, strong or halting, into this world?

God is still moving around in us, surprising us with twinges and cravings, prompting this idea or that ministry.

We don't know when this new thing will be born and what it will look like, but the Life is there.

This community is pregnant with God-life, and we're getting all kinds of interesting kicks, aren't we?

Claims of justice to tackle; an exploration of how to be God's agents in the unpeaceful times in which we live; invitations to go deeper in our faith.

In our Advent Poetry sessions, I have encountered a poem that is speaking volumes to me – *For a New Beginning* by John O'Donohue. Listen:

*In out-of-the-way places of the heart,
Where your thoughts never think to wander,
This beginning has been quietly forming,
Waiting until you were ready to emerge.*

*For a long time it has watched your desire,
Feeling the emptiness growing inside you,
Noticing how you willed yourself on,
Still unable to leave what you had outgrown.*

*It watched you play with the seduction of safety
And the gray promises that sameness whispered,
Heard the waves of turmoil rise and relent,
Wondered would you always live like this.*

*Then the delight, when your courage kindled,
And out you stepped onto new ground,
Your eyes young again with energy and dream,
A path of plenitude opening before you.*

*Though your destination is not yet clear
You can trust the promise of this opening;
Unfurl yourself into the grace of beginning
That is at one with your life's desire.*

*Awaken your spirit to adventure;
Hold nothing back, learn to find ease in risk;
Soon you will be home in a new rhythm,
For your soul senses the world that awaits you.*

God is always doing a new thing.
Are we making room, ready to unfurl ourselves into the grace of beginning?

Amen.

Luke 1:26-45

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a maiden engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The maiden'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 for ever, 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.

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."