

**BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI**  
**THE WORSHIP OF GOD • DECEMBER 1, 2019**  
**THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT**  
**“SAY YES” SERIES**

**The Litany**

*For the Blessing of the Greens Worship*

How shall we prepare this house for the coming of God's Son?

**With branches of cedar, the tree of royalty.**

How shall we prepare this house for the coming of the Messiah?

**With garlands of pine and fir, whose leaves are ever living, evergreen.**

How shall we prepare this house for the coming of the Lord?

**With wreaths of holly and ivy, telling of his passion, death, and resurrection.**

How shall we prepare our hearts for the coming of our Savior?

**By hearing again the words of the prophets,  
who foretold the saving work of God.**

**Glory to God in the highest!**

**The Scripture**

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.*

## The Message *Mary's Yes* Mark Briley

**Synopsis:** *"Let it be with me just as you said."* Mary's confident "Yes" is humbling. She wasn't consenting to serve on a committee or to sign up for a mission trip. With some kind of amazing strength, she was saying, *"Bring it on! I'll serve in this extraordinary way."* It is hard to present her tone, of course, in the ancient text. There was surely uncertainty and a sense of overwhelming mystery, but she still says, "Yes." We call Mary brave. But what is beyond brave? That's Mary. And thank God she said, "Yes."



*It's an event for everyone.* Christmas that is. It says so as the header of Luke, Chapter 2, Verse 8. *An event for everyone.*<sup>1</sup> Do you know that part of the story? Shepherders camping in the neighborhood were having an average night on the job when a “*Marty-McFly-in-a-DeLorean-Back-to-the-future*” like moment blazed around them. It was God’s Glory, the name of the heavenly angel acapella ensemble. The second soprano of the group says, *“Pick your jaws up off the ground – a joyful event meant for everyone, worldwide, has just occurred. Up the road in Bethlehem, a baby is born that will transform the world.”* The group proceeded to sing a couple of Pentatonix arrangements of Christmas carols, and the shepherders agreed that they had never had a better night at work. The angels took off, so the shepherders huddled up and talked it over. *“We’ve got to go, right? To see this kid? After all, she said this is an event for everyone.”* They left, running into town, past the billboard that says, *“Home of King David,”* turning right at the Waffle House, around the karaoke bar to the other edge of town where the star was evident overhead. Yep. The kid was inside. Seeing was believing. It was true. The shepherders chatted up the parents a bit, commented on the sheep stock of that particular stable, and bowed before that baby saying, *“It’s better than even they said it would be. We’ll keep tabs on you, kid. You’ll do amazing things.”* They left more hopeful than they’ve been in a long time and let loose on their way home, praising God for everything they had experienced.

That’s where we’re headed my friends. In 24 days, we’re going to join those shepherders in this praise-fest. That’s our hope. That’s the event that changed the

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<sup>1</sup> This header is worded as “An Event for Everyone” in Eugene Peterson’s *“The Message.”*

world. And it's for everyone. Even you. Even me. I had to start with the hope story today, so we can remember where we're headed, even as I know it might seem a bit premature.

You're not there yet. You may be far from that hope today. You may feel like life is collapsing around you, and you can't see beyond the collapse. Sarah Bessey, author, preacher and self-proclaimed "*Recovering know it all*," wrote a beautiful word this week in anticipation of Advent – the season we launch into today as Christians trekking back to the Christmas manger. Nick and a number of other friends were passing it around. The title says it well enough: "*Does Advent Even Matter When the World is on Fire?*"

Some of us are feeling this. The mess of division. The political elbows being thrown left and right. The heartbreak of Syria's refugees. The violence. The sensitivities to well... everything. And you want us to get all egg-nog cozy and hopeful and Christmas sweateery? Someone said this week a bit resigned, "*It's almost time to switch from your regular anxiety to your fancy Christmas anxiety.*"

Bessey points to the pain, however, and says, "*Hold the tinsel for just a second.*" "*Here's the thing*," she says, "*We enter into Advent precisely because we are paying attention [to the pain of the world]. It's because everything hurts that we prepare for Advent. It's because we have stood in hospital rooms and gravesides, empty churches, and quiet bedrooms that we resolutely lay out candles and matches. We don't get to have hope without having grief. Hope dares to admit that not everything is as it should be, and so if we want to be hopeful, first we must grieve. First we have to see that something is broken and there is a reason for why we need hope to begin with.*"<sup>2</sup>

Advent is our way of holding our arms wide open to the world with hope... even in the mire. And so, we deck the halls, and we light the candles, and we mark the truth that "*God came to be with us once, and God is still with us, and God is coming again to set all things right.*" In this way, Advent is humble protest against the darkness. It is our declaration that we still believe "*God is redeeming all that is broken in us and curing all that is sick in us and bringing all that is dead in us to life.*" And Broadway, I'm signing up for that. I'm saying, "Yes!" to that this Advent season. Will you come with me? Where's your "yes?"

We say "yes" all the time to all sorts of things. Every moment is a "yes" to one choice and therefore a "no" to another. The season of Advent, one of waiting and expectation for God coming fully into our world again and again is a season full of "yeses." Mary, with grit and strength and faith, says "yes" to carrying God in her body. Joseph, asked to come alongside and support with care, says "yes" to being a partner with Mary. The shepherds, caught off guard but grinning in amazement, shout "*Yes! We've got to be a part of this, too!*" And you... us... the collective "we" are asked to offer our own humble

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<sup>2</sup> sarahbessey.com

“yes” to the ongoing story of God incarnate, walking faithfully in the world. In a season full of commitments and stresses, your “yes” will be challenged. Will you make room? We hope... God hopes ... you’ll “Say Yes.” And so, we launch this season of waiting today with Mary.

We get Mary’s “yes” in our Scripture text today. She has the obligatory and life-disrupting angel visit. Mary, maybe all of 14-years-old, has just been watching some Netflix on her smartphone when Gabriel appears. Gabe says, “*Mary – you’re up. Game time. You will bear the Messiah.*” If that isn’t shocking enough, Gabriel thickens the plot for Mary saying, “*And guess what else – you’re much older, but lovely, cousin, Beth is six months into her own pregnancy even though she was said to be barren. How ‘bout them apples?!!!*” Teenage Mary looks up from her iPhone but doesn’t say, “*Wha’dyousay?*” She was hanging on every word and responds: “*I’m in. May your word be true.*”

What do you do when you get a visit like that? What do you do after you say a big “yes” to some new, amazing, scary thing? You seek some supportive confirmation. Mary bolts for the hills to go see Elizabeth with a million thoughts buzzing through her head. She’s got to be feeling her stomach with some confusion about what’s happening in her own body. But then there’s this news about Elizabeth. Surely *that’s* not true. She had not received any invitation to a baby shower. There were no social media posts of Zechariah and Elizabeth’s empty Birkenstocks sitting next to some adorable empty little baby Birkenstocks with the announcement, “*Coming in September.*” If she can get to Elizabeth and find that she is, in fact, give or take 24 weeks pregnant, then this would be some validation to Gabe’s word about what was taking place in her body as well.

We all need this kind of confirmation. It doesn’t always come and certainly doesn’t always come easy, but it’s why we connect with others at church. A shared “yes” is a strengthened “yes.” It’s why we ask others to pray with us and be vulnerable with us. It’s why we invest in faithful friendships and pull on the wisdom of multiple generations of faith. It’s the beauty of this Broadway family, my friends. We hold our longings together and watch and wait; watch and wait.

I have always learned a lot from the fishermen among us. Hoping and waiting seem to be characteristics they all share. I don’t know many fidgety, impatient fishermen. The payoff is often slow. Some have called fishermen the incurable optimists. I asked a friend once how the fishing was going, knowing he was getting out often at the time. “*Better,*” he said. “*Last week I went out for four hours and didn’t catch a thing. Yesterday, I got the same result in only three hours.*” Hoping and waiting. We need each other in this Advent effort even as we must find some courage in our own “yes,” too.

*“Let it be with me just as you said.”* Mary’s confident, “yes” is humbling. She wasn’t consenting to serve on a committee or sign up for a mission trip. With some kind of amazing strength, she was saying, *“Bring it on! I’ll serve in this extraordinary way.”* It is hard to present her tone, of course, in the ancient text. There was surely uncertainty and a sense of overwhelming mystery, but she still says, “Yes.” We call Mary brave. But what is beyond brave? That’s Mary. And thank God she said, “Yes.” She brings us the first “yes” of the season and I marvel at her amazing internal fortitude. Maybe you’ve seen this tenacious spirit in a young person before. It’s special.

A couple of weeks ago, Terry and I made our way to Benton City, Missouri, to honor the life of longtime Broadway faithful, LaVern Covington. LaVern died peacefully after a long and beautiful life. She would have celebrated her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday next week. Now I’m from this part of God’s beautiful world, but I had never heard of Benton City. It’s a blip on the map, not even large enough to be a speed-trap town. Couldn’t find the cemetery on my phone app but was told if I could find the town, I could find the cemetery. LaVern’s daughter, Pam, told us to be sure to use the restroom before we started hitting the back roads, because there is literally no place to do so in Benton City. Terry and I arrived a little early, so we decided to cruise downtown Benton City ahead of the service to check out the town. Then, 27 seconds later, we cruised around



town a second time. We were taken by the quaintness. Here’s a picture of City Hall. Isn’t it something? It was amazing to think of young LaVern, born 1919 in Benton City in a time when girls’ dreams were often suppressed by society. And yet, LaVern left the likes of this City Hall to Times Square in New York City – 17 years old... heading to the Big Apple to become a singer. Where does that kind of “yes” reside? Is it mind? Is it body? Is it spirit? The young LaVern says “yes” to a big dream and goes for it.

The young Mary says “yes” to an unimaginable faith request and trusts God and her own spirited grit. Sixteen-year-old,



Greta Thunberg tackles the climate crisis. Thirteen-year-old Autumn Peltier told the United Nations it was time to “*warrior up*” on World Water Day, fighting to preserve such a precious resource. Khloe Thompson, at just eight- years-old, started Khloe Kares, working to empower people experiencing homelessness to find their own “yes” in the world. And 18-year-old, Deja Foxx’s passionate “yes” went viral from a town hall meeting in Arizona advocating for accessible and affordable reproductive healthcare for all women.

Fourteen-year-old, Marley Dias, frustrated with the lack of diversity in the books she was assigned to read at school launched the *#1000BlackGirlBooks* campaign with one simple goal: to collect and donate books that feature black girls as main characters. Since then, Marley has collected over 9,000 books and published her own book, and

get this title, *Marley Dias Gets it Done: And so, Can You!* a children's book about activism, inclusion, and social justice.<sup>3</sup> YES! Mary's "yes" to the angel Gabriel is every young woman's "yes" who is called to change the world. And that is Mary's Advent hope for us to hold today.

The quest for hope won't always come easy or without injustice trying to hinder its progress. There was a school message board at a school my friend's kid attends that shared this message: *"Is life fair? Short answer: "No!" Long answer – "Noooooooooo!"*

Isn't that the truth? But as Sarah Bessey so beautifully reminds us: "Advent holds the truth of *what is right now* up to the truth of *what was* and *what will be* and then responds like the Psalmist, *I'll never quit telling the story of your love— how you built the cosmos and guaranteed everything in it. Your love has always been our lives' foundation, your fidelity has been the roof over our world. (Psalm 89: 2-3 MSG)*. And this is why we keep showing up. This is why we keep coming back. This is why we keep saying "yes." Because hope presses on even in the darkness.

Daniel Grothe, pastor in Colorado and friend of a friend wrote of this hope-amid-the-pain-of-life this week. He said, *"One of my friends is walking through the Valley of the Shadow. As I was listening to him share his heart this morning, and when the appropriate amount of silence had settled over us, this came out of me: 'You have permission to live the most difficult days of your life in the safety of our presence.'" Grothe said, "That is the summary of Christian community. We all need that permission from each other, permission to be where we are."*<sup>4</sup>

This is love run deep. This is where we create enough space for each other to listen for God... to hear the call... to offer our "yes" as Mary so bravely did. This is church.

I sat in a meeting the other day, which could be the beginning of many a story, but I was soaking it all in. I'm listening a lot these days, as I grow accustomed to this new call, this new community, this new culture. I looked around the table at the variety of faces as they shared their stories. There was hopeful energy, and there was angst of struggles past, present, and future. There were some teary-eyed tales of souls finding their way to "yes." I wrote a single note on the paper in front of me that night: *"Tell your hope story first."* There are plenty of stories being told every day, all around us, that are not hope stories. You want to change the environment of your home or your workplace or your relationships with your extended family and friends? Start telling your hope story first. Game changer. I promise. And you've got one. I promise you that, too.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.dosomething.org/us/articles/young-women-changing-the-world>

<sup>4</sup> A friend shared Grothe's Face Book post with me this week which is what is quoted in this message. Grothe is on staff at New Life Church in Colorado. <http://www.newlifechurch.org/staff>

Driving home, *Mumford and Sons*<sup>5</sup> came on my Bluetooth. It was the track simply called *42*. Part of the lyric says, “*Where do I turn to when there's no choice to make? And how do I presume when there's so much at stake? I was so sure of it all... but what if I need you in my darkest hour? And what if it turns out there is no other? If this is our last hope we would see a sign, oh, we would see a sign.*”

If this is our last hope, we would see a sign.

Friends, I know we blur our seasons together. Statistically speaking, many of us are still eating Thanksgiving leftovers; 79% of Americans say eating Thanksgiving leftovers is more important than eating that feast the first time around.<sup>6</sup> Before that meal is even gone, we're here again saying, “*Shift. Move. Turn. Release. Hope. Start again. Say 'yes'.*”

I started this message with the hope story. That's where we're headed. And may Mary's strength find its way into our souls this morning, so that when that call for courage comes our way today, tonight, or tomorrow... we might say with knowing confidence, “*Yes, Lord. I'm in. May it be with me according to your word.*”

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<sup>5</sup> [www.mumfordandsons.com](http://www.mumfordandsons.com)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.cnn.com/2012/11/21/living/thanksgiving-by-the-numbers/index.html>