

Ahhhh....the first Sunday of Advent!

Doesn't the chapel look beautiful?

And doesn't she feel beautiful, and peaceful....

when I walk in here, I'm not sure that I really want to leave,

**I'm not sure that I want to get back into the crazy, hectic business
of the holiday season....**

The Chapel, especially during Advent, really is a house

by the side of the road that offers shelter, warmth, peace and love.

I wonder if Mary and Joseph were looking for such a place

as they traveled to Bethlehem so many years ago...

Can you just picture this couple in your mind's eye?

She... a young woman riding a donkey

and so heavy with child.

and He... a bit older, walking silently by her side .

**I can't imagine that they wanted to be traveling so far from home
with her almost ready to give birth.**

...but the orders of the Roman Emperor could not be refused.

The Emperor could not have cared less about this couple...

He could not have cared less if she died or the baby died...

It would have been just a couple less Jews for him to worry about!

Today's reading is a simple re-telling of the birth story of Jesus

from the gospel of Luke...

**Quite a rather inauspicious beginning for one of the most awesome lives
in human history!**

But I believe that this story has become so familiar,

so comfortable, so sweet...

it has lost its power for many of us!

This little baby boy whom we call the Son of God was born in very humble circumstances amidst the sheep and goats...

to a couple who were not yet officially married!

Think about that! Mary was an unwed mother when Jesus was born...

When we see the pictures of this event,

the straw is always nice and clean,

Mary always looks fresh and her cheeks are rosy,

Joseph is strong and confident....

Jesus is always a chubby and angelic looking infant!

It could not have been this way:

For one thing, giving birth is always a very messy, exhausting thing to do!

Joseph would have never been prepared to help Mary give birth....

And I am sure, that Mary greatly missed the companionship and the expert help of the women in her family who would have known exactly what to do!

and don't forget, the situation of Mary and Joseph

was completely against the religious and social mores of the time...

Back then, Mary could have been stoned to death for becoming pregnant before marriage...

and Joseph was considered a fool for staying by her side...

So, I have to wonder, as they journeyed along did they ever think to themselves: What did I get myself in to?

Have I made the right decision

in these circumstances

at this point in time?

Is this really the will of God?

Those are hugely important questions...

they are questions *we too* could ask when we think about the choices of our lives...

I think it is safe for me to say,
that everyone sitting here in the Chapel this afternoon
desires a real relationship with the Holy One,
only perhaps we are not sure what that will demand of us
or where that will lead us...

We probably hope that it will lead to angelic babies, clean straw
and angels of choirs singing 'Alleluia'
but most often life isn't like that.

Most often life is messy and unclear and our choices leave question marks in
our minds and scars on our hearts....

So, how can we be sure that we really do know what God desires of us?
How can we trust, that when we find ourselves stepping outside of everything
that is socially correct, religiously appropriate and culturally acceptable
that we are actually following God's lead?
Can we really ever be 100% sure??

How did Mary and Joseph do it?

Were they 100% sure???

While we do not know what was going on inside Mary and Joseph's head and
heart...we do know that they were as human as the rest of us....

And if they were as human as you and I...
then I highly doubt they were 100% sure that what they were doing was
absolutely, positively God's desire...

And for me, that is a great relief!

Thomas Merton, a Trappist monk and mystic of the 20th century, once said that we will never absolutely know whether or not we are following God's will....but that kind of certainty is unnecessary.

When our heartfelt desire is to allow the Presence of the Holy to live in and through our lives that is enough!

Then, Come what may: whether it appears we are successful or not, Merton says that we can trust that God is with us and will bring new life in us and through us and most of the time.... in ways we could never have imagined.

**As we begin this Advent season,
remembering the birth of the Jesus more than 2,000 years ago
Let us create some time to nurture our relationship with the Holy One....
To Breathe, to Pray, to say "Yes"...**

**Let us say 'yes' to the presence and action of God in and through our lives...
let us be willing to allow God to lead us in ways beyond our understanding...
Let us be willing to live with uncertainty and be willing to trust
in the sure Presence of God in our life's journey.**

**and, Let us say "yes" to remembering and celebrating
the 'Yes' of Mary and Joseph....
Because then, celebrating Christmas will not be just a sentimental
remembering of a long ago event buried under exhausting business.....
but a time and a season that OUR journey begins into the unknown
so that we might give birth to the Holy One once again each and every day....
Let us say Yes, so that the whole world may sing
"Glory to God and Peace to all peoples on Earth!" Amen.**

