

## Let It Be

**Overview** Living life out of God's possibility rather than our own control

**Theme** Let It Be

**Metaphor/Image** Sonogram

**Treatment** We are often faced with decisions that seem impossible and mandates that don't make sense. Mary's decision to the angel to "Let it Be," which is an acceptance of God's call to bear Jesus, is an inspiration for us to live life out of possibility rather than a need to control our own futures.

**Human Need** We all fear the inability to control our own lives and need courage to accept God's will for our lives.

**Experience** That we experience a loving God who calls us to live a life beyond our own control, and make a decision to live out of God's agenda.

### Word

**Primary Scripture** Luke 1:26-38

**Lectionary week** 4<sup>th</sup> Week of Advent; 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:47-55

**Related Scripture** Genesis 18:1-15 (Sarah's conception), 1 Samuel 3:2-9 (call of Samuel), Luke 1:8-20 (Zechariah's story)

### Topic(s)

**Primary Topics** life of Jesus, faith, God's will, God's plan, choice, surrender, decision, calling, destiny, courage, humility, servanthood

**Related Topics** Mother's Day, gender, sexuality

### **Movie(s)**

1. Where the Heart Is (2000)  
Plot: Pregnant 17-year-old Novalee Nation (Natalie Portman) rebuilds her life after being abandoned by her boyfriend at a Wal-Mart in rural Oklahoma.  
  
Clip: After birthing a baby in a Wal-Mart, Novalee (Portman) expresses fear about her future, until the nurse brings her new baby. Good example of letting the future be.  
Time: (VHS) 28:01-29:50, (DVD) Chapter 7, 0:00-1:49, length 1:49

### **Music**

1. "Let it Be" - The Beatles. A huge hit with appropriate lyrics, great for an opener.
2. "Sweet Child O' Mine" - Guns and Roses, covered by Sheryl Crow. Top 40 hit, good for an opener.
3. "(What if God Was) One of Us"- Joan Osborne. Top 40 hit.
4. "With Arms Wide Open"- Creed. A top 40 song dedicated to the singer's newborn daughter. Heartbeat noises open and close the song. Good for an opener or feature.
5. "What Child Is This"- Christmas hymn.
6. "O Come O Come Emmanuel"- Christmas hymn.
7. "Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence"- traditional hymn.

### **Lumiclip description**

The image of the sonogram creates a moving visual interpretation of the story of the angel appearing to the young woman Mary, as told in the Gospel of Mark. This Lumiclip may be used with the storyteller's voice as a complete clip, or without the storyteller's voice as a background for a live telling of the story. Contemplative, Inspirational. Running time xxx Volume 6 Clips 7 and 8

### **Integration**

#### **Interpretive notes**

The annunciation is the intimate story of Mary's experience of the announcement that she would become the mother of the Messiah. The main character of this story is the angel, Gabriel, who was sent by God to deliver this news to Mary. The story begins with the notice that Gabriel is sent to Mary in the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy and his announcement ends with the news to Mary that Elizabeth, her elderly

cousin, is six months pregnant. As a result, the stories of John's conception provide the frame for this announcement about Jesus. While most of the story is Gabriel's words to Mary, the experience of the story is hearing these words from Mary's perspective. The climax of the story is Mary's affirmation and acceptance of the vocation to which she has been called by God: "Let it be with me according to your word."

The spirit of Mary's words is often interpreted as her passive agreement with the Lord's plans for her. But the pattern of the birth announcement stories in the Old Testament is of women who have earnestly and aggressively sought a child. These women in whose lineage Mary stands are not passive receivers but are fully active participants in God's saving activity. It is more likely that Mary's final words to the angel were a strong affirmation and acceptance of God's election of her rather than a passive resignation to God's strong will.

The story is directly parallel to the announcement of John's birth to his father Zechariah, that begins Luke's Gospel. Thus, Luke 1-2 is structured by this connection:

1. Announcements: concerning John (1.5-25) concerning Jesus (1.26-38)
2. The meeting of Mary and Elizabeth (1. 39-56)
3. Birth, circumcision, prophecy, and childhood: of John 1.57-80 of Jesus (2.1-52)

These stories are in turn similar to the stories of announcement and birth stories of Ishmael and Isaac (Genesis (15.1-6, 16.1-16; 18.1-15; 21.1-20), Samson (Judges 13), and Samuel (I Sam. 1-2.10). In contrast to Matthew, Luke uses this Old Testament pattern in his story of Jesus' birth. The elements of the narrative pattern that are variously present in the particular stories are: the entrance of the angel or of God, perplexity of the hearer, the heavenly message, the objection, reassurance and sign, the birth, and the glorification of the Lord. When seen and heard in the context of this narrative tradition, the impact of these stories is even greater. The conception of John required the miracle of an old

woman conceiving a child as had the conception of Isaac. And the mothers of Samson and Samuel had received the miracle of conceiving a child when they had previously been barren. But the birth of Jesus required an even greater miracle: the conception of a child by a virgin. God's intervention was present in all of these instances but the Jesus story is the culmination of the tradition.

The story clarifies Jesus' identity and role. Thus, the two parts of the angel's message are 1) that he will be the Davidic Messiah (1.31-33) and 2) that he will be the Son of God (1.35). Jesus is identified as the Son of God in all the Gospels but they each present a different and evolving picture of when he became Son of God. In early stages of the community, Jesus was affirmed as Messiah and Son of God in the aftermath of his resurrection with the implication that he became God's Son then. In Mark, Jesus becomes God's son at his baptism. In Luke Jesus is identified as God's Son at his birth. And John identifies Jesus' identity as Son of God at the beginning of time with the idea of the incarnation. One can see the development of early Christian stories about Jesus' identity in this evolving narrative tradition.

Furthermore, this story has had a strong and energetic life in the history of Christian tradition. The glorification of Mary and the development of the extensive oral and doctrinal traditions about Mary is one of the major motifs in the history of Christian thought. Mary is presented as "the favored one" who is the model of Christian discipleship and the handmaiden of the Lord. She fully cooperates with God's plan of salvation. This is in contrast to the characterization of Mary in Mark's story of the Beelzebul controversy and the family of Jesus (Mark 3.21,33-35) when Mary and Jesus' brothers come to get him because they conclude he is out of his mind. But in Luke Mary is the model believer from the beginning.

The experience of the story is of wonder and amazement at the ways of God and at the spirit of this young woman, Mary. The delight of the OT birth announcements with their combination of anticipation and delight at the vindication of women such as Sarah and Hannah established a story tradition that is picked up and

developed by Luke. These are some of the greatest stories in the biblical tradition. Luke has built on that tradition with a distinctive portrayal of the wonder of the conception of Jesus.

Luke focuses on the experience of Mary in this story. What was it like for a fifteen year old young woman to receive such a message from God? What were the social consequences for her of being pregnant before she was married? Most important, how did she understand what God was doing? Obviously, she couldn't fully understand what God was doing. She could only trust that God would make something of this highly unusual situation. We can see in retrospect that her faith in God was fully appropriate.

This story reveals a dynamic that is present for every person. In every life there are dynamics of accepting and affirming God's will and purpose in trust without knowing where it will lead or what God will be able to do in the future. This spirit of Advent of waiting in anticipation and trust for God's coming is a good spirit for each of us. The recognition of the traditions of God's involvement in the conception and birth of the religious leaders of Israel is both a source of wonder in itself and a sign of God's involvement in the lives of each person. We don't know what God will make of us. We too can learn to say with Mary, "Let it be with me according to your word."

### Call to Worship

"How many of us have seen a sonogram of an unborn child?

"Even if it isn't your own child, it is an absolutely amazing experience. A moving sonogram transforms a pregnant abdomen from an unknown experience into a carrier of God's creation.

"Sometimes we cannot see what God is creating in our lives. Like the young girl in Luke's story, though, God wants us to accept the Divine will as our best future. We just need to declare, "Let it be."

### Storytelling/Scripture Recital

Angels have a problem in biblical stories. They have to get persons to calm down before they can deliver

their message. Gabriel's style may be more "cool" and relaxed than the usual heavy and authoritative manner of traditional readings. The angel in Luke has a distinctive character that needs to be caught appropriately.

For the announcement that follows the comforting, leave behind the profound, above-it-all, English accent angel-eze. On the other hand, don't just deliver this announcement in the same monotone that you might use to tell someone where to find the restroom. Mary's declaration to "let it be" takes on more meaning with an appropriately delivered angel voice.

For an optional performance, mute the audio track on the accompanying storytelling video and accompany the telling with a live instrumental rendition of "What Child is This," possibly with sonogram f/x played through the sound system.

#### Closing words/Benediction

"May the blessing of God be with you in all the ways Christ is being born in you. Be on the alert for the angel of God speaking to you this week."

#### Prayer

"Lord, God of all creation, we give you thanks for the miracle of the conception and birth of your Son. We rejoice at the spirit of Jesus' mother Mary, who was willing to accept your divine future for her life. We open ourselves to receive and give birth to your purpose for our lives. Give us the courage and humility that was in Mary. We surrender all that we have and all that we are to you. Bring to birth what you want in us. Let it be. Amen."

#### Drama

One possibility is a monologue from Mary's point of view. The setting could be a park, where a young girl slowly swings on a swing, deep in thought. The angel's appearance was earlier in the day. The sketch is the congregation hearing Mary's thoughts as she contemplates what the angel has said, and ends unresolved. An unresolved ending provides a good segue to a sermon.

## Display

A TV monitor with a running sonogram, looping

## Other

### **Keywords**

life of Jesus, faith, God's will, God's plan, choice, surrender, decision, calling, destiny, courage, humility, servanthood, Mother's Day, gender, sexuality, sonograms, pregnancy, baby, motherhood, Where the Heart Is, feminism