

In the story leading up to Jesus' birth there is the repeated question, "How?" Before Jesus was born, his relative John the baptizer was born. Before the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary to announce that she would conceive and give birth to Jesus, the Angel appeared to Zechariah, who would be John's father.

...there was a priest named Zechariah... His wife [was named] Elizabeth... They were both righteous before God, blameless in their observance of all the Lord's commandments and regulations. They had no children because Elizabeth was unable to become pregnant and they both were very old. One day Zechariah was serving as a priest before God...he was chosen by lottery to go into the Lord's sanctuary...An angel of the Lord appeared to him...When Zechariah saw the angel, he was startled...

The angel said, "Don't be afraid, Zechariah. Your prayers have been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will give birth to your son and you must name him John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many people will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the Lord's eyes...He will make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

Zechariah said to the angel, "How can I be sure of this? My wife and I are very old." (Luke 1:5-18)

An angel appears and startles Zechariah with news that his wife will give birth to a son. It is unbelievable news. Zechariah and Elizabeth are of the age that they could join AARP and get the senior discount at IHOP. Their hopes of having a family have long vanished. Zechariah asks, "How?" How can this happen? How can I sure? How? When the angel Gabriel appears to Mary, Mary also asks, "How? How will this happen?" (see Luke 1:34). When the angel appears to Joseph, he seems to also ask, "How? How is this God's doing?" (Joseph does not explicitly ask, but I think it is fair to imply). It is the question, "How?" that seems to ring-out louder than the startling pronouncement by Gabriel, the angel.

Many of us also ask, "How? How can this be? How can life get better? How can I be sure? How can I know? How can I carry out God's purposes? In the story of the angel with Zechariah and then with Mary, it seems that asking, how expresses faithlessness. Even more so than asking, "Why?" Asking why expresses a struggle. Asking how seems to express faithlessness. We say, God is all powerful and yet ask how it is possible for God to do something. We pray because we have faith that God can do something, and sometimes deep in our soul we wonder how the prayer can be answered.

This season of Advent is an opportunity for us to see ourselves in the stories. To look deep inside ourselves and the "hows" we ask.

How can this be?  
How can there be reconciliation?  
How can I be fulfilled in my life?  
How can I do what God is calling me to do?  
How can I be faithful in the world of utter faithlessness?  
How can the situation change?  
How can things be different?

What are your "Hows?"

to be continued on Friday, December 14th.

Faith is the assurance of things you have hoped for, the absolute conviction that there are realities you've never seen.  
(Hebrews 11:1 The Voice)

Hope, joy and peace through faith,

Pastor Jeff