

# Conference Minister's Corner

## Four Advent Reflections for Four Sundays of Advent

By Rev. Amy S. Zimbelman (alongside Henri Nouwen for #1 and Madeleine L'Engle for #4)



1. There are so many things to be afraid of -- our own feelings, other people, the future. And fearful people have a hard time waiting because when we're afraid we often want to get away from where we are. So it's interesting that the whole opening scene of the good news is filled with waiting people: Zechariah and Elizabeth, Mary, Simeon and Anna (waiting at the temple). And all those people hear a message of courage over fear as they wait: "Do not be afraid. Something good is coming." (Reflection inspired by Henri Nouwen.)

2. In the first chapter of Luke, there are two announcements. Zechariah and Mary are both visited by angels who share that the usual laws of reproduction will be suspended for their babies to be born.

Zechariah receives the news with skepticism, arguing with the angel that he and his wife are too old for pregnancy. So the angel gives him a forced silent retreat, a pregnancy of his own.

Mary, on the other hand, responds to her equally impossible news by offering reverence to God and offering herself as a servant of the Lord. The song she sings declares that God's mercy is for those who fear him (who show reverence) from generation to generation.

The difference between the two is, of course, attitude. One receives his good news with skepticism and disbelief. The other receives hers with wonder.

May we follow Mary's example of reverence and awe this Advent at the mystery that God would choose life with us.

3. Human newborn babies are so vulnerable that the first three months of life are sometimes called the "fourth trimester of pregnancy." And it's true—a few more months of preparation in utero would make facing this harsh world slightly easier. For me, early parenthood's sleepless nights were, in part, from worries that if my precious little ones smushed their faces on the crib's mattress the wrong way, they could so easily suffocate, since their necks were barely strong enough to reposition their faces and airways.

God could have come to humanity as a fully-formed, able-bodied adult male—a symbol of power and invulnerability. But God didn't. God came as a newborn baby, dependent on his Mama Mary for love and milk and turning him so the manger's hay wouldn't block his airways. And so we learn much from the type of God who comes in a vulnerable state. This is God's love incarnate, and love is always inherently vulnerable.

### 4. The Risk of Birth By Madeleine L'Engle

This is no time for a child to be born,  
With the earth betrayed by war & hate  
And a comet slashing the sky to warn  
That time runs out & the sun burns late.

That was no time for a child to be born,  
In a land in the crushing grip of Rome;  
Honor & truth were trampled to scorn—  
Yet here did the Savior make His home.

When is the time for love to be born?  
The inn is full on the planet earth,  
And by a comet the sky is torn—  
Yet Love still takes the risk of birth.

