

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

JUSTICE ISSUE: HUNGER, POVERTY, ECONOMIC INEQUALITY, DIGNITY OF ALL PERSONS, RIGHTS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE/ LECTIONARY WEEK: Luke 1:26-38, Luke 1:47-55

**SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/
BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES:** Economic Community, Social Community

OBJECTIVE: Youth will explore how God's grace invites us to say yes to God's work, like Mary, and identify ways they can stand up for justice, care for people in need, and help create a world where everyone is valued.

SUPPLIES NEEDED: Pen, Paper, Social Principles: Economic Community/Social Community

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

Say: Welcome, everyone! I'm glad we're together today. Before we begin, let's check in with each other. Does anyone have prayer requests, exciting news, or something from this week they would like to share?

Pause for sharing.

Say: Thank you for sharing. Today we're going to meet Mary, a young woman who receives an unexpected message from God. She is invited into something much bigger than herself. Mary doesn't know exactly how everything will unfold, but she responds with trust. Her story reminds us that God often works through people the world might overlook—and that young people have a voice and a part to play in God's work.

Has anyone ever asked you to do something that seemed too big for you? Maybe you were asked to take responsibility for something new, speak up when it was uncomfortable, help someone who needed you, or try something you weren't sure you could do.

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Ask: Would anyone like to share what that experience was like?

Pause for responses.

Pray: Loving God, thank you for bringing us together. Open our hearts to Mary's story and help us hear the good news in her song. Remind us that your grace comes to us before we have everything figured out. Give us courage to say yes when you invite us to love our neighbors, stand up for justice, and care for people who are hungry or overlooked. Help us remember that our voices matter. Amen.

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Say: Our first passage is from Luke 1. The story takes place under Roman occupation, when the Jewish people lived under the power of the Roman Empire. Mary is a young woman from Nazareth. She is not a ruler or a wealthy person with political influence. Yet God's message comes to her. God invites her into a story that will change her life and the world. We're going to read this passage as a readers' theater. We need a narrator, Gabriel, and Mary. You can volunteer for a part, or I can read the parts myself. Remember, there's no need to act dramatically. Just read the words clearly.

Assign the roles.

Read Luke 1:26-38

Reflection Questions:

- What do you think Mary might have been feeling when Gabriel first spoke to her?
- Why might saying yes have been difficult for Mary?

Say: Mary's yes does not mean she understood everything or had no fear. She asked a question. She listened. And then she responded with trust. Faith doesn't always mean having every answer. Sometimes faith means taking the next step when we don't yet know the whole story.

Notice something important in this story. Gabriel calls Mary 'favored one' before Mary does anything to earn that favor. God's grace comes to Mary as a gift. Her response

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comes after the invitation. In our United Methodist tradition, we often talk about *prevenient grace*, God's grace that comes before us, reaching toward us before we even know to look for God. God's grace is not a prize we earn by being perfect. Grace is God's love and invitation coming to us first. We respond to that grace by choosing how we will live.

Ask: What is the difference between saying yes because you're afraid you'll get in trouble and saying yes because you trust someone and want to respond?

Pause for responses.

Say: John Wesley taught that we do not earn God's love by doing good works. Instead, God's grace makes it possible for us to respond in love. We cooperate with grace. We join in what God is already doing. Mary's words, 'Let it be with me,' are not a way of earning God's favor. They are her response to the grace she has already received.

After Gabriel's visit, Mary goes to see Elizabeth, who is also expecting a child. Mary responds to what God is doing with a song of praise known as the *Magnificat*. The name comes from the opening words in the Latin version of the song, meaning 'magnifies' or 'makes great.' This is not just a quiet song about feeling happy. Mary sings about a God who changes the way the world works. God scatters the proud, brings down the powerful from their thrones, lifts up the lowly, fills the hungry, and sends the rich away empty.

Read Luke 1:47-55

Say: Mary is rejoicing, but she is not pretending that everyone is already treated fairly. Her song expresses trust that God is faithful to the promise of a different kind of world.

Reflection Questions:

- What words or images in Mary's song stand out to you?
- Why do you think Mary talks about the proud, the powerful, the lowly, the hungry, and the rich? What do these words tell us about the kind of world God wants?

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Say: Mary's song tells us that God cares about people's real circumstances. Hunger matters. Poverty matters. The way people are treated matters. God's love is not limited to private feelings; it has something to say about how we organize our communities and share our resources. Mary also reminds us that people who are often overlooked are central to God's work. She is young, she has limited social power, and yet her voice carries a message about the future of the world.

Say: Our United Methodist Social Principles help us connect faith with the way we live together. Two sections are especially relevant today. The *Economic Community* section speaks to hunger, poverty, economic inequality, and the responsibility to care about people's wellbeing. The *Social Community* section emphasizes the dignity and worth of every person, including children and young people. Young people are not just the future of the church and community. They are part of the church and community now, with voices and gifts that matter. I'm going to read one statement from each section. As you listen, think about how Mary's song connects with what you hear.

Read the first statement and give a brief explanation. Then read the second statement and explain it.

Reflection Questions

- Where are young people sometimes left out of decisions at school, church, or in our town?
- What might change if adults listened more seriously to young people's ideas and experiences?

Say: Mary's story challenges us to notice whose voices are heard and whose are ignored. Her song also challenges us to notice who has enough and who is going without. God's invitation is not limited to people who are already powerful. God can work through young people, ordinary acts of generosity, and through communities willing to change what is unfair.

NOTES

*Leader preparation: Before the lesson, select **one** statement from the United Methodist Social Principles' Economic Community section concerning hunger, poverty, or inequality, and **one** from the Social Community section concerning the dignity or participation of children and young people.*

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GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Say: Now we're going to imagine that Mary has agreed to an interview the day after Gabriel's visit. One person will be the reporter, and the other will be Mary. The reporter's job is to ask thoughtful questions. The person playing Mary should answer based on what we've heard in Luke 1, especially her response to Gabriel and her song. You don't have to pretend to know details the Bible doesn't give us. Use your imagination but stay connected to the Scripture.

Pause for students to pair up and pick role as reporter or Mary.

Say: Work with your partner. The reporter should ask Mary these three questions.

1. What scared you or made you uncertain?
2. Why did you say yes?
3. What do you hope God will do?

Mary, try to answer in your own words, drawing on the story and the Magnificat. After about three minutes, switch roles so both people have a chance to be Mary and the reporter.

Pause for activity. Three minutes for the first interview and three minutes to switch roles.

Debrief Questions:

- What did you learn by trying to answer as Mary
- What would it take for young people today to say yes to something risky for good?

Say: Mary's yes was not a promise that life would be easy. It was a response of trust. And God did not ask Mary to make the world right all by herself. Her story is part of God's much larger work. We can follow her example by asking where God's grace is already at work and how we might join in.

Mary's song describes God lifting up the lowly, filling the hungry, and challenging

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the proud and powerful. Let's bring that song into our own time. We are not rewriting Scripture or replacing Mary's words. We are using the message of her song to think about the needs and injustices we see around us today.

Divide youth into pairs or small groups. Give each group paper and pens.

Say: Your group/pair will choose one idea from Mary's song and write a short, modern version that connects with life today. You can use this sentence as a starting point:

'God has filled the hungry with _____ and sent the powerful away from _____.'

You might write about access to food, housing, education, fair treatment, or young people having a voice in decisions that affect them. Try to make your words specific. Instead of saying only, 'God helps people,' you might name what help looks like or what needs to change. Remember that Mary's song is about God's justice and faithfulness, not about insulting people who have resources. Think about how power and resources can be used to serve others and help repair unfairness.

Allow groups/pairs to write.

Say: Let's hear each group's version of Mary's song. As you listen, notice the kind of world each group is hoping for.

Invite each group to read its lines.

Reflection Questions:

- What needs did you hear in these versions of the song?
- What is one thing a young person or a church could do to respond to one of those needs?

Say: John Wesley taught that we respond to God's grace by doing good. He encouraged people to care for the hungry, visit people who were sick or imprisoned, and serve people who were poor. These are called works of mercy. We don't do these

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things to earn God's love. We do them because God's love has already reached us, and we want to share that love with others.

Now we'll make this personal. On your paper, complete this sentence:

'Let it be with me ...'

After those words, name one small, real action you are willing to take. For example, 'Let it be with me to help with the church food drive,' or 'Let it be with me to speak up when a classmate is treated unfairly.'

Choose something realistic. It doesn't have to solve a huge problem. It should be a step you can actually take.

Allow one minute for writing.

Say: If you want to share your sentence with a partner, you may. You can also keep it private and offer it to God in prayer.

Say: Mary's yes reminds us that young people can participate in God's work. Her song reminds us that God cares about hunger, dignity, and justice. Our own yes can be one small way we join that work.

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN)

Pray: God of grace, thank you for Mary and her courageous yes. Thank you that you see people the world overlooks and that your love reaches us before we know how to respond. Give food to those who are hungry, hope to those who are struggling, and dignity to those whose voices are ignored. Help us notice where people are left out or treated unfairly. Teach us to share what we have, listen to young people, and work for a community where every person has worth. Like Mary, help us trust you enough to say yes. Show us how to join your work through small acts of courage, generosity, and justice. May our lives magnify your love. Amen.