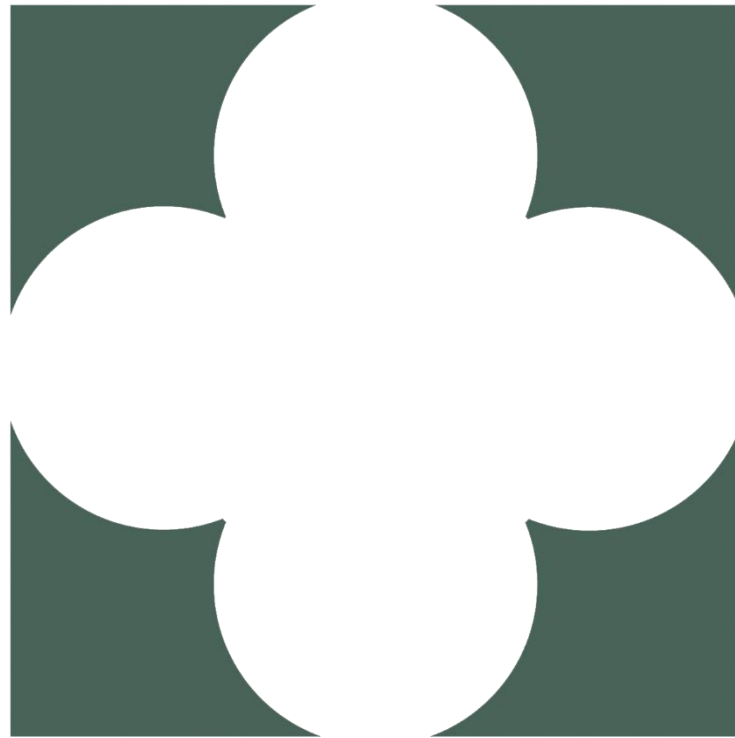


# Holy Preparations

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Judges 13:2-7

I believe the word has already been shared through music today, so I will only offer a brief reflection. Please listen to these words that come to us from the Hebrew Bible, **Judges 13:2-7**. Many of you know we are using a new lectionary during Advent. It is written by Dr. Wilda C. Gafney. This interpretation of the Hebrew Bible text is also by Dr. Gafney.

*Now there was a certain man from Zorah, of the tribe of the Danites, and his name was Manoah. His wife was barren; she had never given birth. And the messenger of the Holy One appeared to the woman and said to her, "Look now, you are barren, having never given birth, you shall not eat anything unclean. For look! You shall yet conceive and give birth, you shall conceive and give birth to a son. Now please be on guard not to drink wine or strong drink, and you shall not eat anything unclean. For look! You shall yet conceive and give birth to a son. No razor shall be upon his head, for a Nazirite to God shall the boy be from the womb. And he shall begin to deliver Israel from the hand of the Philistines." Then the woman came and spoke to her husband saying, "Someone from God came to me, and their appearance was like that of a messenger of God, incredibly awesome; I did not ask the messenger from where they came, and their name they did not tell me. Yet they said to me., "You shall conceive and give birth to a son; do not drink wine or strong drink, and do not eat anything taboo, for a Nazirite to God the boy shall be from the womb until the day of his death.*

*The word of God for the People of God, thanks be to God.*

For a few minutes I would like to talk about **Holy Preparations**. In our gospel text that Pastor Tim read earlier in the service we heard Mary's song of praise. Mary praised God for the awesome opportunity to participate in God's plan of salvation. The child shall be called Emmanuel, God with us. Mary's divine blessing caused her life to take a drastic change. Womanist Hebrew bible scholar Dr. Renita Weems asked the question in her landmark book

***Just a Sister Away:*** how do we receive a blessing that causes more problems than it solves? I believe that if God brings us to it, God will see us through it.

In the gospels we are not told of specific preparations Mary took to get ready for the child of the most high God. But we do know about Samson's mother and the preparations she had to take.

Samson's mother was also barren, like Sarah and Elizabeth, whose stories we've heard the last two weeks. Samson's mother has no name in the text. Time will not permit me to flesh that out. But I'm sure for the author of this text, Samson's mother had only one significant purpose, that being to give birth to one of the judges—a powerful but vulnerable man named Samson.

Once again, we hear of angels crossing the veil as Jan Richardson mentioned in our Advent meditation this week. A heavenly messenger came to Samson's mother and told her she would soon have a son. But while she was carrying this mighty one who would help deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines, she was to prepare herself. She was to become a Nazirite. One who took the vow of a Nazirite was not to partake of any wine or fruit of the vine. They were not to eat anything ritually unclean, and they were not to cut their hair. Women and men took this vow, and, in our text, Samson's mother was now set aside for holy work.

In the womb Samson would grow and develop as a Nazirite and then maintain that lifestyle even after birth. Holy preparations were required for this mother to be.

During Advent we talk about waiting and preparing for the Holy One to show up anew our lives. But what are we doing as we await a word, a sign, or direction from on high? Are we shopping and decorating? Partying and baking cookies? What are we called to do during this time of preparation?

Well, I have a few ideas. You may have your own list and I would love to hear how you prepare for Emmanuel. Here are three quick thoughts of mine.

1. How do you prepare? Stop—just stop. Stop running, stop doing, stop planning. If we are constantly in motion, our brains and spirits are in motion as well. We need to make room in our lives and open our hearts for the in breaking of the holy. When we slow down, we may see God in new ways. We may hear from God in ways we have not recognized before. One thing we can do to prepare for God's new thing is to stop doing what we've always done.
2. Samson's mother was called to change her diet. She was to stop eating foods in an ordinary way and live as one dedicated to the Holy One. Now, what that says to me is that we must pay attention to what we are doing to and with our bodies. In other words, some of us may need to stop numbing ourselves. And we numb ourselves differently. Some have a calendar so jam packed with dates, to-do's, and Zoom meetings that there is no room to squeeze in a feeling or an extra thought. Others of us numb with food—OK, I just started down my street. I never met a carb I didn't like and dark chocolate is my best friend. What do you do to numb your feelings? Wine, a good scotch, exercise, gossip? And then there is marijuana—it is legal these days. In this season of parties and opulence, it would be *radical* to order our lives so we can feel the Spirit's presence.
3. Lastly, how do we prepare for Emmanuel? By saying yes to Spirit. What do you mean preacher? That means putting God first in our lives. I know that may sound rather evangelical, but to me that is what following the way of God means. Saying yes to God is to put God at the center of our lives instead of putting ourselves there, or our career, or our addiction, or our family. When God is the center of our lives and the center of our joy, our priorities change. It is no longer about me, mine, and myself. It is about the least, the last, the lost, the lonely and the left out.

So, as we wait for God to show godself anew, let us take our time of preparation seriously. There are two weeks left in Advent. What is Spirit saying to you today? The Christmas story is about ordinary people following Spirit's call. The angels were real, and the star shined brightly. The shepherds saw it and followed it. The thing about the stars is that we must look up to see them. Yes, we may have to look away from our screens to catch a glimpse of the holy. When we look up and out and over there, we may see and hear angels. We may also see the star that leads us to our divine destiny. Rise up my people and follow that star.