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The Advent journey to peace (Part One)

John Dear | Nov. 28, 2007 On the Road to Peace

Sunday is the beginning of Advent, my favorite liturgical season, a time of prayer, preparation, hope and peace. I suggest we look to Mary, Jesus' teacher of peace and nonviolence, for clues over the next few weeks about how to welcome anew the God of peace. The Gospel of Luke portrays the Advent journey to peace in the three movements: first with the Annunciation as a scene of contemplative nonviolence, which leads to the Visitation as a scene of active nonviolence, and finally the Magificat, as the epitome of prophetic nonviolence, the groundwork for Jesus' great sermon.

According to the Gospel of Luke (1:26-38), the Advent of the nonviolent Jesus begins in this first movement with prayer, solitude, silence, attentive listening, and steadfast waiting for God's word of peace. Mary is a contemplative, a person of quiet prayer and solitude. She sits listening attentively to God, and dwells in the peace of God. In that silence and stillness, she is ready for God to speak.

That's the beginning of the journey to peace. Every day, we too can take time to sit in silence and solitude, in contemplative prayer, and listen for God. When we do, oddly enough, we notice once again the violence within us, whatever keeps us unpeaceful. The prayer of peace begins by noticing that inner violence and giving it all -- all our anger, resentments, hurts, wounds, bitterness, and hatreds -- to God, so that God will disarm our hearts and give us the gift of peace. As we practice this contemplative nonviolence and let go of our violence, we become more and more peaceful like Mary. We make peace with ourselves so that we are at peace within ourselves and with all creation, and ready for the coming of the God of peace.

In the story of the Annunciation, the angel tells Mary that she is to welcome a savior whose reign of peace will never end. Mary realizes the political implications of this announcement. God is taking sides, not with the rich and the powerful, the imperial warmakers or religious authorities, but with an unwed refugee woman. Mary does not rejoice at this news. She is terrified and confused. She does not understand this, but she knows it could be dangerous and costly. Here is another clue for Advent. When God enters our lives, we become afraid and disturbed. The God of peace comes to end the culture of war, to disarm the warmakers, and dismantle the empire. This work of God will be dangerous and costly for those who serve God. It may be helpful to sit with our fears and our confusion, before we take a new step forward on the Advent journey of creative nonviolence.

Afraid and confused, nonetheless, Mary says yes to the God of peace. How does she do it? How can we?

The answer lies in her response. "Behold," says Mary, "I am the servant of the God of peace. May it be done to me according to your word." Mary says yes to God because she knows who she is. She announces to the angel

that she, Mary, is the servant of the God of peace. It doesn't matter what she thinks, how afraid she is, or how confusing the journey appears. She will do whatever the God of peace wants because she is the servant of the God of peace. She roots her identity completely in the God of peace. Because she is firmly rooted in God, she accepts whatever God wants of her. That's that.

This self-understanding is at the heart of the spirituality of peace and nonviolence. No matter what the culture tells us about ourselves, no matter how it labels us as Americans, consumers, or soldiers, we see ourselves first and foremost as servants of the God of peace; more, as God's very sons and daughters. Only then can we transcend our fears and confusion and questions. Only then will we be able to welcome God's reign of peace on earth.

Claiming this core identity begins with sitting in peace, becoming comfortable with the climate of peace, befriending the God of peace, and discovering our true selves as children of peace. Once we claim our core identities as servants of peace, as children of peace, we too will say yes to the God of peace. We will accept anything God wants; we will take any risk for peace. We know that we are sons and daughters of the God of peace, that our security and future lie with our beloved God, and so we will do whatever God asks.

This Advent, we might ask ourselves: Can we say yes to the God of peace with the same faith, hope and trust as Mary? Do we really want the God of peace to come to us? Dare we pursue and herald the coming of a new culture of peace? Have we grown content with the culture of violence? Comfortable with the big business of corporate greed and imperial war? Dare we allow the nonviolent Jesus to disrupt our settled ways and set us on a new disruptive path, as Mary did?

Can we surrender ourselves once again to the God of peace, with the selfless courage and daring faith and bold hope of Mary of Nazareth? I believe we can. We can say yes to the God of peace, and let the chips fall where they may, trusting that, in the long run, the fruit, the outcome, the finale, will be glorious, that like Mary, we too will blessed, we too will be peacemakers, we too will be heralds of a new world without war, poverty, racism, sexism, violence or nuclear weapons.

The Annunciation invites us to become contemplatives of nonviolence, mystics of nonviolence, like Mary. The whole point of prayer, contemplation and mysticism, is not so that we can hurt others, or bomb others, or dominate the world, but so that we can commune with the living God of peace and live in peace with everyone on earth, our very sisters and brothers.

This Advent, we pray, "God, I surrender myself to you once again. Take my life. Use me for your work of disarmament, justice, and the healing of creation. Open my life to your holy disturbances, my career to your holy upheaval, my plans to your disruptive love. You, God of peace, are all the matters. Peace on earth is my greatest hope, my most important work-the meaning of my sojourn. Take me, God of peace. Do with me as you will. Make me too an instrument of your peace. Let me be part of your reign of peace, of your nonviolent coming into the world."

Once we say yes to the God of peace in our contemplative nonviolence, we too will rush off like Mary, on the second stage of Advent, to serve those in need, to love our neighbors, and to practice active nonviolence.

For daily Advent reflections, see John's new booklet, "The Advent of the God of Peace" from **www.paxchristiusa.org** **[1]**. For further reflections on Mary as a teacher of nonviolence, see John's book, *Mary of Nazareth, Prophet of Peace*

from Ave Maria Press. "The Narrow Path," a new DVD featuring John Dear, is available from **www.sandamianofoundation.org [2]**. For further information, see **www.johndear.org [3]**.

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