

## Taking the time to contemplate God's invitation

Photo: Anne Germond

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The image I've chosen for this year's Christmas cards is the picture of the Zimbabwean Madonna and Child carving that stands proudly on the windowsill in my study. Looking at it causes me to imagine Mary treasuring in her heart all the things that have been said to her about her child by those first visitors—scatty shepherds and royal kings. Jesus, her son, is secure in her arms gazing out at the world he loves so very much. His eyes are filled with hope that his kingdom of peace will come on earth as it is in heaven.

It's Mary's hands that always capture my attention when I look at them. They're the strong and protective hands of a mama bear but at the same

time the tender and gentle hands of a new parent filled with wonder and amazement at the gift of their newborn child. I think God's dream for our world is that every child will experience such protective care and tender gentleness in their lifetime. May we speak up and out for children and youth who do not know this kind of love or who are lost, estranged, separated or orphaned by war.

I've always had a special affection for Mary. Perhaps it has something to do with the years I spent as a schoolgirl with the Sisters of Mercy, the nuns who first taught me to pray the Rosary. Perhaps it comes from praying with the icons of the Virgin that have helped me catch a glimpse of a new transfigured world. Mostly though, I think it comes from pondering the Scriptures, especially the passage that tells us of Mary's attentiveness to the Messenger

Angel. Her “yes” to God in which she accepts the invitation to be overshadowed by the Holy Spirit gives her a new title—*Theotokos*, “God bearer.”

Over the years I thought Mary’s “yes” to God’s invitation was immediate, but then I was introduced to the poet Denise Levertov’s poem “Annunciation.” I commend it to you. The moment on which Levertov focuses in her poem is a moment of waiting—God’s waiting on Mary.

*But we are told of meek obedience.  
No one mentions courage. The engendering Spirit  
did not enter her without consent.  
God waited.*

*She was free  
to accept or to refuse, choice  
integral to humanness.*

That moment when God waited was a holy space—the silent, contemplative space that is pregnant with possibility, opportunity and hope. God’s invitation always requires a human response through pondering, questioning and, finally, acceptance or refusal.

The word “Advent” means the beginning of an event or the arrival of something new. As you spend time with God this holy season, I invite you to be attentive to the new thing God may be inviting you into. God is the perfect host who will wait while you pray, and ponder, question and then affirm with your own, “Here I am Lord, let it be with me, according to your word.” (Luke 1:38) Do not be afraid to say “yes,” for God is always with you.

I wish I could send you all one of my beautiful Christmas cards. The message inside them is my wish for you:

“May your heart know the peace of Christ, now and in the coming year.”