

305 God communicates, we participate

This Advent, stimulated by Jersak, Tutu and Wright,^[302-4] I've seen the Christmas story anew. It's about how God communicates and, if we're willing, we participate.

'Beloved in Christ, be it this Christmastide our care and delight to hear again the message of the angels...'

The magi are spiritually open to new things... they participate by travelling huge distances.

Zechariah and Elizabeth are told about their first baby ('at our age?!'); I guess they had to, er, 'participate'.

Mary is told something totally mind-blowing; she participates, agrees to be 'the Lord's servant', and accepts the possibility of a mysterious conception (I'm deliberately not saying 'supernatural').

Joseph is horrified, I guess, but is listening; he has a dream, and participates by marrying her despite what people will think.

The shepherds are communicated to – big time! They participate: they abandon their charge (did they lose their jobs, for neglect?), and go to Bethlehem.

The magi are still listening and, to protect the New King, they participate, risking real trouble with Herod by heading home a different way – surely, *someone* would have noticed the huge camel train and told Herod.

Joseph is warned in a dream about Herod's plan, leaves his home, family and livelihood, and flees with Mary and Jesus to Egypt (we often gloss over this biggie – 400 miles?).

So that's the pattern I'm seeing: there are people (us?!) who need to listen to God, participate or partner with God to do amazing things – not necessarily dramatic, but still amazing – to help to make God's kingdom come.

By contrast, I used to feel I had to defend the annunciation as being miraculous: her 'supernatural' conception was God intervening. Swayed by the ancient Greeks, we make the (totally non-Jewish) distinction between 'natural' and 'supernatural', saying that God broke in and 'performed a miracle'?

So to go back to what started my journey in 2017: I now feel that faith should be more relational and mysterious, and not about propositions (statements of faith) and transactions (my agreeing to believe and so having my sins forgiven).^[303]

Here's my over-stated, over-simplified before and **after**:

Propositional and transactional	Relational and mysterious
Me going to heaven ^[303] – escaping from the suffering of earth	Heaven coming to us on earth now, to help alleviate suffering; and ‘on that day’ ultimately and fully
God intervenes in earthly affairs – ‘does miracles’ – natural/supernatural dichotomy	God asks us to listen and cooperate, to sort things out – ‘miracles’ are a natural part of the mystery of God’s creation
A ‘cross-centred’ church = focusing on my sin and the solution that Christ brings	A ‘cross-centred’ church = we are self-emptying, ^[302] like Jesus, giving our lives for and to others
Suffering? I have to (try to!) justify how an all-powerful and all-loving God watches people suffer and yet does nothing.	Suffering? Being self-emptying, the Father creates us and then allows natural consequence. ^[302] But God seeks those who will participate, to help sort out the mess.

Difficult to put a life-changing journey into so few words.

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