

4 Advent B The Baby Boom

This is the irrational season

When love blooms bright and wild.

Had Mary been filled with reason,

There had been no room for the child!

—~~Madeline~~ L'Engle.

Had Mary pondered very long would she have changed her mind about the angel's announcement?

After all she was a young girl in her teens preparing for her wedding night and now she gets pregnant! What would Joseph her fiancé think? What would their hometown of Nazareth think let alone her parents?

What would a young girl what with a baby anyway?

Fertility rates are dropping from Japan to Germany to the United States. What are the

chances that we're going to want another Child to come into the world?

Her name is Aaliyah, meaning "high" or "exalted."

It's a perfect name, as you'll soon see.

When Aaliyah was born, she weighed just 12 ounces, and fit into the palm of her mother's hand. She arrived about four months early, and had been growing too slowly in her mother's womb. When she entered the world, she was the second-smallest surviving baby ever to be born in Great Britain.

Before her delivery, doctors warned Aaliyah's mother that her daughter had only a 10 percent chance of surviving. They recommended termination, but she and her husband said no. They had been trying to have a baby for more than 10 years. The parents of this little girl were desperate for their own little baby boom.

Against all odds, Aaliyah was born, and showed an amazing fighting spirit. After a few days on a life support machine and four months in the neonatal unit, Aaliyah made it home to enjoy Christmas with her family. Said pediatrician Jeff

Bissenden, "I've never seen anything like Aaliyah."

She's a miracle baby, one who has been lifted up as high and exalted by her grateful mother and father. But although this is a story that warms the heart and brightens the soul, the truth is that from Japan to Germany to the United States, we're talking about a baby bust, not a baby boom. People are having fewer and fewer babies.

Here in the United States, the total fertility rate has dropped from 3.2 children per woman in 1920 to 2.1 children today. In Europe, fertility declined from 2.8 children per woman to 1.5, over the period between 1970 and 2000.

How come?

Careers? Responsibility? Or is it the cost of raising a child through college?

Researchers at the University of Minnesota are now putting forth another cost: the value of 401Ks. You see because of savings and pensions people no longer need lots of children to care for them in old age. And there is Long

Term Health Care insurance as well. Anyway, that is the theory of current research.

We can understand the reaction of Mary to Gabriel—the announcement is astonishing, and quite frankly, Mary deems it to be impossible: “You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus” (Luke 1:31)

Any other bride today might have left town and shown up in Albuquerque, only to sign on a \$500,000 book deal and appear on NBC.

Though it might not be unusual for a bride to waddle down the wedding aisle six months pregnant to be received by some hapless fellow who put her in that condition, it was unusual in Mary’s day.

Yet Mary receives the news as a blessing. Like the name Aaliyah, “high and exalted,” Jesus is described as one who “will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David’ (1:32). Gabriel predicts that he will reign over the house of Jacob, and will rule an everlasting kingdom.

Mary ponders this, but not for long. “Here am I,” she says, “the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word” (1:38). Boom! A child is accepted, and the course of human history is changed forever.

What a difference a baby makes.

Well, to Mary at least.

You could argue that her baby boom is our baby bust.

Do we really want this baby?

Are we really ready to welcome this child—not into the world—but into *our* world?

Or are we more inclined, upon hearing the claims this child puts upon us, to hit the road and get outta here?

Mary said a resounding “Yes” to God. Her baby boom was our blessing. Her willingness challenges us to be receptive to God’s promises and our joy to put him first. “Here am I, the servant of the Lord.” Would you say that with me as a prayer to God. I invite you now to pray this

Litany with me with that response, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord.”

Leader: The next few days are going to be ones of celebration. They are also going to be filled with stress. What a great time to say, every morning,

People: “Here am I, the servant of the Lord.”

Leader: How about when you are traveling to visit relatives, and the grandkids are in the back seat bickering with each other about who has the most room? What a great time to say,

People: “Here am I, the servant of the Lord.”

Leader: Very late Christmas Eve, when the presents aren't yet wrapped, and the “some assembly required” gifts come in a bag filled with 200 pieces. What a great time to say,

People: “Here am I, the servant of the Lord.”

Leader: Back at work, when your boss or your employees are cutting corners, and you are feeling pressure to behave unethically, what a great time to say,

People: "Here am I, the servant of the Lord."

Leader: Back at school, when others make fun of you because you aren't dressed in the perfect style, or someone pushes you to do something you don't believe in, what a great time to say,

People: "Here am I, the servant of the Lord."

Leader: Out in the community, when people show disregard for a neighbor, or the homeless have their sign at the Sam's Club or word is out that some child needs help, what a great time to say,

People: "Here am I, the servant of the Lord."

Leader: Back at church, when your leaders are counting on you to dig deep into those pockets to balance your budget, and keep a roof over our heads, you can say..

People: "Here am I, the servant of the Lord." You can say it out of habit. You can say it for comfort. You can say it as a way to enter into solidarity with Mary. You can say it as a prayer to help you do the things that you know God

wants you to do. Any time can be a great time to say,

People: "Here am I, the servant of the Lord".

When we say these words, we are saying "Yes" to being open, and faithful to the promises and the priorities of God. We are showing a willingness to allow the Christ child to be born in us today.

A baby can make a huge difference, especially when we allow Jesus to go BOOM in our lives.
AMEN.