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Luke 1:26-38

*Let Heaven and Nature Sing: Fire*

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Luke 1:26-38 (New Revised Standard Version

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. And he came to her and said, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.” But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He 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. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. 36And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.” Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

This Advent we have been concentrating on the elements. We have called it Let Heaven and Nature Sing: an elemental advent. We talked about the earth and how our earth is broken. We talked about Michael Brown killed in Ferguson and Tamir Rice killed in a park in Cleveland holding a toy gun. We talked about how 1 in 3 black males born today can expect to spend time in prison during his lifetime. Black lives matter.

We talked about air and Eric Gardner’s last words as he was placed in a fatal chokehold, “I can’t breathe.” We talked about breath and spirit and God’s Holy Spirit with us. We prayed for our African-American brothers in this country who are more likely to be arrested, more likely to be executed, more likely to be killed. “I can’t breathe.” Our justice system is broken and we need God.

And yesterday Officers Rafael Ramos and Wenjian Liu were murdered in their patrol car in Brooklyn. We pray for healing for the racial divisions in our nation. May Jesus forgive our racism and violence and save us.

We talked about water and Jesus’ baptism and how the waters of our baptism remind us that God has us in God’s hands and God is not going to let us go. We talked about the Christmas carol, “O Little Town of Bethelem” and its words “Yet in the dark streets shineth, the everlasting light. The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.” And we wrote our fears on disappearing paper and watched as our fears disappeared in the water right before our eyes.

Today we talk about fire. I want to share with you about the lodgepole pine tree. The lodgepole pine tree loves fire. When a lodgepole pine tree grows, their cones are tightly sealed. The seeds are locked in tight and the cone can not open and spread its seeds to make more pine trees unless it is exposed to very high temperature. Lodgepole pine tree cones can be closed in the pine tree for 30-50 years.[[1]](#footnote-1) And without fire, the seeds would never be released. Once a fire burns through the seals of the cone, the cone scales open up and the seeds fall out.[[2]](#footnote-2) After the seeds fall to the forest floor, the process of new life begins quickly and the next generation of trees can begin to grow.

After a forest fire lodgepole pine trees are everywhere. The seeds love the carbon rich soil that fire leaves behind, and new pine trees pop up almost immediately.[[3]](#footnote-3) They grow into dense stands of trees and before you know it, there’s a whole new crop of lodgepole pine tree cones waiting in anticipation for the next fire to blaze through. [[4]](#footnote-4)

Roy Renkin who works as a vegetation management specialist at Yellowstone National park, after the forest fires in Yellowstone in 1988 said, “It’s not as though the fire burns and the place is nuked. What we see above ground may look burned very badly, but there’s a lot of activity below ground.”[[5]](#footnote-5) After the 1988 forest fire, 95% of the new pine trees took root and grew in the first year after the fires.[[6]](#footnote-6) But the places where the lodgepole pines and other plants have struggled to return is a result of human interference that has done more harm than the fire themselves. Firefighters used a bulldozer to scrape out a fire line in 1953 and all around the fire line the forest has recovered but not around the fire line. The firefighters scraped away the topsoil and scraped away the seed source of those lodge pole pines.[[7]](#footnote-7)

I was visiting with someone this week who has suffered a lot this past year. I asked them if anyone had ever shared with them that God never gives us more than we can handle. This person said yes, and I asked them if they believed that it was true? They shook their head no. And I shared with them that when bad things happen that God does not cause it, God does not cause the fires in our lives. But God can make new life come out of the fire. God can bring good out of bad. God can spread the seeds of help new beginnings to grow. And I imagine the person who says God needed another angel or God never gives us more than we can handle, they are trying to help. But they are like that fire line that the firefighters scraped out with a bulldozer thinking it would help.

Without fire, the seeds that bring new life and new growth are not released. I want to share with you from the Gospel of Luke as Mary receives the news that she is going to be the mother of the Most High, the one whom the Lord God will give the throne of King David. Her Son would reign over the house of Jacob forever and of his kingdom there would be no end. Mary had heard that a fire was at her door. Her life was going to be turned upside down. But out of that fire came new life, out of that fire came Jesus.

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1. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=94534548> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=94534548> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. http://indianapublicmedia.org/amomentofscience/lodgepole-pine-trees-love-forest-fires/ [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. http://indianapublicmedia.org/amomentofscience/lodgepole-pine-trees-love-forest-fires/ [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=94534548> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=94534548> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=94534548> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)