

There is nothing more satisfying than a finished to-do list. It feels like such an achievement to be able to say, "I have done it all. I am officially ready." Humans love this sense of being in control, of mastering the world around them. Which is probably why Christmas is so difficult. Because we might prepare the practicalities, but to be ready for Christmas, for the coming of God, asks us to put our to do lists aside, and simply open ourselves up to God.

Read Luke 1.26-38

26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, **27** to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. **28** And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you." **29** But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. **30** The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. **31** And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. **32** 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. **33** He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." **34** Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" **35** 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." **36** And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren. **37** For nothing will be impossible with God." **38** Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord." So the angel departed from her.



Erol Ahmed

This is the radical message of the Christian Gospel – we can't find our way to God by our own effort. Instead, God comes to us, seeks us out and offers us grace. All we bring is ourselves, as we are, in truth and openness. To be ready for God, maybe we need to "unlearn" the things we've been doing or thinking – that we need to make ourselves "worthy" or "good enough". Preparing ourselves for Christmas means being completely open to God and being ready to throw our lists away.

Archbishop Justin Welby and Rev Isabelle Hamley

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