

## Call from Tomorrow

Matthew 1:18-25

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No matter how familiar we are with that story, it should still grab us and make us think, wonder, and (maybe) smile at the ironic beauty.

A pregnant virgin is a sign that God is doing something radically new and different. And God didn't choose to act through what was perfect or even conventional. God's radically new thing will be done through a small village scandal—an unwed, pregnant teenager.

This summer, on my sabbatical, I was reading in some corners of Christian theology that were new to me. One was a book by the Taiwanese theologian Choan-Seng Song entitled *Third-Eye Theology*. The book interprets Christian thought through the lens of East Asian cultural idioms, finding touch points with Eastern religions, such as Buddhism.

Published in 1972, the book is also deeply affected by the war in Vietnam. I realized that I don't think I'd ever read a rich theological response to that war, and I definitely had never read an Asian perspective.

The middle section of the book is entitled "Suffering Unto Hope." In this section he explores the impact of the war upon families and women in particular. Yet, his discussion is framed within the concept of hope. Remembering, of the deceased in particular, is an essential part of hoping in the midst of suffering.

He also writes that "Memory does not only have to do with what has taken place. It enables us to anticipate the future and envision what is still to come. In a sense we can also say that memory is the power of the future."

In Matthew's story, the Holy Spirit moves within Mary's womb and Joseph's dreams. Matthew focuses on Joseph, who is challenged in his dreams to do something radical because God is at work. And we admire Joseph because he listens and obeys.

When the Spirit moves among us, we are called into a new and abundant future. Theologian J. Kameron Carter writes that the gift of the Spirit "liberates all things into the possibility of not just being or existing, but into the possibility of flourishing."

This Advent we have tied together remembering and dreaming as essential tasks in our preparation for the coming of Christ again into our lives. Essential to my own understanding of this season is the idea of the medieval mystic Meister Eckhart that the birth of the Christ is not simply some historical event to be remembered. It has meaning for us if we understand that Christ can be born anew in us. For me, every Advent is a reminder of and a preparation for this renewal. God can do a new thing for me and in me and through me. If I am willing. Choan-Seng Song writes that "When God acts, something new happens."

In our hopes and dreams, the Spirit is calling us from tomorrow, offering us a realm of endless possibilities where we might flourish. This is what we anticipate this Advent and every Advent as we wait and prepare for the Birth of Christ.

So, remember. Tell your stories. Know who you are.

Dream. Hope for the future. Imagine possibilities.

And respond to the call of God, who keeps surprising us by making all things, including ourselves, new.