

God's persistence

By [Henry J. Langknecht](#)

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The annunciation is analogous in my mind to the story of God's invitation to Abram to leave Ur and head to Canaan. Both stories have a bare, binary feel to them. These are hinge moments in the unfolding of God and God's mission with and for the world. Abram, yes or no? Mary, yes or no?

In the mainstream Western tradition the sentiment seems to lean toward the idea that the responses of Abram and Mary are somehow inevitable. Most preaching I hear about Abram hints that God chooses to make the invitation to him because God is fairly certain he'll say yes. This is even more the case with Mary--especially under the influence of the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, which teaches that nine months before she's even born, Mary is prepared for God's call by being protected from sin.

But there is another strand of tradition that seeks to give a greater role to human free will. Here we can play with the idea that not even God knows in advance what answer Abram or Mary will give. It is possible to imagine God and Gabriel asking the question, then sharply inhaling and holding that breath, waiting to hear what the response will be. In that moment we can contemplate how much of the universe's destiny is being staked on the decision of a Mesopotamian herder and a young woman of marrying age.

The flippant side of this contemplation is to imagine that if Abram or Mary says no, all is not lost. God will ask another, and then another, and then another.

We humans are pretty stuck on our importance to God's mission, in part because we haven't figured out how to have sensible conversation with any other life form. Not to mention that we often act as though we are the only object of God's attention, to the detriment of the earth's very life. But God's mission issues forth from God's loving desire for the entire cosmos.

When I'm sitting in the pew on December 18, I'd like to hear less about how God's work depends on Mary or me and more about God's persistence and creativity in bringing the whole cosmos to fulfillment--regardless of my will or lack of will to be part of it.