

COPING WITH CHANGE AT CHRISTMAS

By: Mary Lambrecht, M.S. LMFT

Dennis the Menace is a cute little boy whose behavior annoys his parents and especially his neighbor, Mr. Wilson. But there is one thing you can count on in the cartoon-world of Dennis the Menace; his age never changes! Today, as well as five, ten or even forty years ago, he was still mischievous...and he was still 5 years old. However, unlike the consistent age of Dennis the Menace, change is commonplace in family dynamics. Many people agree that changes in family matters are difficult in general, but oftentimes the Christmas season magnifies these difficulties. I recently spoke with a woman who had weathered many changes in the past year. Her only son had died, her own health was declining, her only daughter seemed emotionally detached from her (most likely a grief reaction) and financial issues frightened her. At one point in our conversation, she turned to me and said; "But I do feel Him helping me."

Mary, the mother of Jesus, upon hearing from the angel Gabriel that she was to give birth to Jesus, was also coping with change. Mary's response to these life-altering circumstances, gives us a model of how to help ourselves when changes unsettle us or even terrify us. I have used the letters in the word 'COPE' to serve as a kind of acrostic tool to describe some of the ways Mary responded, and then as a guide to apply to our own changes:

C: Consider: Consider examples from the past where God has proved his help and faithfulness in your trials and problems. Upon learning of her pregnancy, Mary said to her cousin Elizabeth; "For He who is mighty has done great things for me." (Luke 1:49)

O: Opportunities: Seek opportunities for fellowship with others who can encourage and support you. For three months, Mary stayed in the home of her cousin Elizabeth, who was six months pregnant with John the Baptist. (Luke 1: 39-56).

P: Praise: Give praise and thanksgiving to God for the *future*. God will use these present challenges to bless the future that He has planned for you. Elizabeth said to Mary; "Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord." (Luke 1: 45). One of Mary's responses to Elizabeth was: "For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed...And His mercy is on those who fear Him." (Luke 1: 48 & 50).

E: Every: Bring every feeling, every concern and fear to God. Mary did not try to hide her feelings from the angel Gabriel; "Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary,..." (vs. 30). Mary was also honest with Gabriel about a key

question/concern she had: “*How can this be, since I do not know a man?*” (Luke 1: 34).

Remember that your changes are no surprise to God. Before you were formed in the womb He knew you (Psalm 139: vs. 13 & 14), and He knew what changes would be part of your life. If Christmas brings more change than sameness, His love is big enough to carry you through.

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P.O. Box 1676, Appleton, WI 54912 (920) 720-8920

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