

MARY AND THE WORD OF GOD

(LUKE 1:26-38)



Mary is the central figure in Luke's account of the birth of Jesus. Our Gospel reading today presents us with the scene of the annunciation of the birth of Jesus by the angel Gabriel, God's messenger.

However, this is not a simple announcement: Mary is not the passive instrument by whom God's purpose is achieved; rather, this depends on Mary's willingness to accept her place in God's plan. Throughout Luke's Gospel account, the evangelist emphasises the importance of God's *word*. It is this word that Mary accepts and to which she commits herself. In this way, she is the model of the disciple, one who listens to God's word, meditates upon it and puts it into practice. We hear this theme restated in different ways often in Luke's narrative.

The annunciation of a birth is a frequent event in the Bible and the last example before this one is that given to Zechariah in the Temple, about the birth of John the Baptist. Such an account indicates the importance of the child to be born and his place in the Lord's plan for Israel. But there is a crucial difference between the annunciation to Mary and all the rest. In every other case, the woman has been unable to bear a child, which to everyone else would be an indication of punishment from God, hence the shame attached to her condition. God intervenes to remove the cause of her barrenness and the child is conceived in the normal way. There is no indication that Mary suffers from any condition which would prevent her having a child – quite the reverse – but Luke's concern is to show that Jesus has no human father and is the Son of God. The virginal conception of Jesus is a far greater miracle than the birth of the heroes of Israel – and of John the Baptist. ■

REFLECT

Advent is the season when we think of Mary's place in the story of God's dealings with the human race and of her importance in the life of the Church, the people of God. She is held up as a model for the disciples of Jesus. But even for Luke, her importance lies not so much in her being the physical mother of Jesus, but in her attitude to the word of God, listening, meditating and putting it into practice. It is in this that Mary can be our model.

We may feel that we cannot do much to advance the kingdom of God, but as long as we try to live up to our Christian calling, then we are doing all that the Lord expects of us. Bringing up a family, living our life in the light of our faith, is what being a disciple of Jesus is all about. One thing we might keep in mind is that Mary and Joseph were real human beings, and it is clear that committing themselves to God's plan was not easy. In that, they can be truly examples that we can follow. ■

DO

Put out the figure of Mary from your crib set: use it during the week to help you reflect on Mary and her positive response to God's word.



LEARN

The mystery of the incarnation is better described as "the virginal conception of Jesus", rather than "the virgin birth".

Annunciation narratives in the Bible are stereotyped stories, designed to highlight the importance of the child to be born.

The annunciation to Mary is the only story of this type to include a virginal conception.

SAY

**Hail Mary, full of grace,
the Lord is with you.**

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

Drop down dew from above, you heavens,
and let the clouds rain down the Just One;
let the earth be opened and bring forth a
Saviour.

COLLECT

Pour forth, we beseech you, O Lord,
your grace into our hearts,
that we, to whom the Incarnation of Christ
your Son
was made known by the message of an
Angel,
may by his Passion and Cross
be brought to the glory of his Resurrection.
Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of
the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

FIRST READING 2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-12, 14, 16

A reading from the second book of Samuel.
Once David had settled into his house and
the Lord had given him rest from all the
enemies surrounding him, the king said to
the prophet Nathan, "Look, I am living in a
house of cedar while the ark of God dwells in
a tent." Nathan said to the king, "Go and do
all that is in your mind, for the Lord is with
you."

But that very night the word of the Lord
came to Nathan: "Go and tell my servant
David, 'Thus the Lord speaks: Are you the
man to build me a house to dwell in? I took
you from the pasture, from following the
sheep, to be leader of my people Israel; I
have been with you on all your expeditions;
I have cut off all your enemies before you.
I will give you fame as great as the fame of
the greatest on earth. I will provide a place
for my people Israel; I will plant them there
and they shall dwell in that place and never
be disturbed again; nor shall the wicked
continue to oppress them as they did, in
the days when I appointed judges over my
people Israel; I will give them rest from all
their enemies. The Lord will make you great;
the Lord will make you a House. And when
your days are ended and you are laid to
rest with your ancestors, I will preserve the
offspring of your body after you and make
his sovereignty secure. I will be a father to
him and he a son to me. Your House and your
sovereignty will always stand secure before
me and your throne be established for ever.'"

The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

PSALM

Psalm 88

Response:

I will sing for ever of your love, O Lord.

1. I will sing for ever of your love, O Lord;
through all ages my mouth will proclaim
your truth.
Of this I am sure, that your love lasts for
ever,
that your truth is firmly established as the
heavens. (R.)
2. "I have made a covenant with my chosen
one;
I have sworn to David my servant:
I will establish your dynasty for ever
and set up your throne through all ages."
(R.)

3. He will say to me: "You are my father,
my God, the rock who saves me."
I will keep my love for him always;
with him my covenant shall endure. (R.)

SECOND READING Romans 16:25-27

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the
Romans.

Glory to him who is able to give you the
strength to live according to the Good News I
preach, and in which I proclaim Jesus Christ,
the revelation of a mystery kept secret for
endless ages, but now so clear that it must
be broadcast to pagans everywhere to bring
them to the obedience of faith. This is only
what scripture has predicted, and it is all part
of the way the eternal God wants things to
be. He alone is wisdom; give glory therefore
to him through Jesus Christ for ever and
ever. Amen.

The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia!
**I am the handmaid of the Lord:
let what you have said be done to me.**
Alleluia!

GOSPEL

Luke 1:26-38

A reading from the holy Gospel according to
Luke.

The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a
town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin
betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the
House of David; and the virgin's name was
Mary. He went in and said to her, "Rejoice, so
highly favoured! The Lord is with you." She
was deeply disturbed by these words and
asked herself what this greeting could mean,
but the angel said to her, "Mary, do not be
afraid; you have won God's favour. Listen!
You are to conceive and bear a son, and you
must name him Jesus. He will be great and
will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord
God will give him the throne of his ancestor
David; he will rule over the House of Jacob
for ever and his reign will have no end." Mary
said to the angel, "But how can this come
about, since I am a virgin?" "The Holy Spirit
will come upon you" the angel answered
"and the power of the Most High will cover
you with its shadow. And so the child will be
holy and will be called Son of God. Know this
too: your kinswoman Elizabeth has, in her old
age, herself conceived a son, and she whom
people called barren is now in her sixth
month, for nothing is impossible to God." "I
am the handmaid of the Lord," said Mary "let
what you have said be done to me." And the
angel left her.

The Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

**I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.**
**I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,**

**begotten, not made, consubstantial with
the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
(all bow during the next three lines)
and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the
Virgin Mary,
and became man.
For our sake he was crucified under
Pontius Pilate,
he suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord,
the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is adored
and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.
I believe in one, holy, catholic and
apostolic Church.
I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness
of sins
and I look forward to the resurrection of the
dead
and the life of the world to come. Amen.**

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

May the Holy Spirit, O Lord,
sanctify these gifts laid upon your altar,
just as he filled with his power the womb of
the Blessed Virgin Mary.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

**Behold, a Virgin shall conceive and bear a
son;
and his name will be called Emmanuel.**

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Having received this pledge of eternal
redemption,
we pray, almighty God,
that, as the feast day of our salvation draws
ever nearer,
so we may press forward all the more eagerly
to the worthy celebration of the mystery of
your Son's Nativity.
Who lives and reigns for ever and ever.
Amen.

Which Mary? A woman "blessed because she
believed" always and everywhere in God's
words, or a "plaster statue" from whom we
beg favours at little cost? The Virgin Mary
of the Gospel, venerated by the Church at
prayer, or a Mary of our own making, one
who restrains the arm of a vengeful God, one
sweeter than Jesus the ruthless judge, one
more merciful than the Lamb slain for us?

Pope Francis

