

Sunday Message

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

THE WORD

Year B • 24 December 2023 • Psalter Week 4

TO SAY "YES"

LUKE 1:26-38



Today, with Christmas almost upon us, the liturgy focuses on Mary.

Christians have honoured Mary from the Church's earliest days. So many feasts have been established in her honour, so many churches named for her, so many religious congregations called after her. We have given Mary many titles - Mother of God, Mother of the Church, Madonna, Queen of Heaven, Mother of Perpetual Help, Immaculate Conception - the list goes on - but there are other words to describe her too - teenage mother, believer, seeker, disciple, refugee, emigrant, visionary. Mary was no passive partner in God's plan. She had agency and she had grit, as much as it was possible for a young woman to have in her day.

Mary teaches us three lessons as we approach the nativity.

The first is about faith. Mary was human. She had doubts, she had questions. Her 'yes' was not an automatic, pre-programmed response, as today's Gospel tells us. She hesitated. She was confused. Later, as a mother, she worried about Jesus, what he was up to, the trouble he was getting himself into. She was on a constant learning curve, growing in her understanding of God's plan for her and for humanity, growing to be a steadfast disciple, growing in faith all the way to the foot of the cross. That's why she is our model of faith, first among the saints.

Like Mary, our faith is a work in progress. We have our doubts, disappointments and struggles. God's ways are not always clear to us. But that's okay because, like Mary, we are only human after all. As with Mary, we trust in God despite everything and seek to deepen our faith all our days.

Mary was human, which means we mustn't attempt to deify her. There is a danger that we exalt her so much we strip her of her humanity, make her like a God. Of course, she was graced and blessed in a uniquely singular way, but still she was human, just like us. That's essential to remember because it acknowledges her role in salvation history and it makes her more accessible. She is one of us.

Second, Mary was a prophet, a visionary, a social justice advocate. We sing her Magnificat so often its words can lose their potency. Mary talks about turning the world upside down, inverting the established power structure, knocking the mighty from their thrones, raising up the lowly, filling the starving with good things, sending the rich away empty. The woman who makes this prayer is no shrinking violet. She describes a whole new way of living and relating, a vision of the kingdom of God. The religious and political leaders of her time wouldn't have liked what she said. Today's titans of Wall Street and of Silicon Valley wouldn't like it either. Some politicians would denounce her as a dangerous leftie while also making some disparaging remark about uppity women.

Like mother, like son. Mary's vision echoes Jesus's address at the beginning of his public ministry: "I have come to bring good news to the poor, liberty to captives, a year of God's favour." And like mother, like son, our option must also be for a whole new way of living and relating, one that anticipates the kingdom of God.

Third, Mary reminds us of our call to give birth to Jesus. More than 1,500 years ago, in 431AD, the Church gave Mary the title of Theotókos, a Greek word meaning "God-bearer." In the West, this title was translated into Latin as Mater Dei or "Mother of God." As mother of Jesus, who is the incarnate Word of God, Mary is God-bearer, mother of God. She bore Jesus in her womb, birthed him, brought him into the world, and so she is Theotókos.

That same commission has been given to us. Like Mary, we must be Theotókos, God-bearer, in our time and place. Like Mary, we must respond to God's invitation to each of us to conceive, carry and birth Jesus in our lives. Like her, we must say: "May it be done to me according to your word." In other words, that, by the love I show, the compassion I display, the forgiveness I offer, the vision I promote, I will give birth to Christ, make God visible, this Christmas and all my days. ■

REFLECT

In the angel's visit to Mary, we can almost hear Mary thinking. She's startled, even afraid. Then as Gabriel speaks, she's puzzled. As she listens, questions occur to her, and she's curious. When Elizabeth is mentioned, she's reassured: this is something she can check out for herself. Then she decides to co-operate. She doesn't simply give in — she makes up her own mind: she will serve the Lord. And she does.

So here is how the disciple is to respond to God's word: you listen, you reflect, you ask questions, you match the word of the Lord that you hear with your own experience of life. Then you make your decision and God is with you, too. ■

PRAY

Christmas, the great feast of God-with-us, is almost here. Pray for a deeper awareness of God with you every day.

LEARN

Mary is not only Jesus' mother, she is also his first and best disciple.

DO

Mary's discipleship began when she accepted God's plan. Yet this could only come about because of her previous willingness to trust God in the course of her life. Her discipleship is not one of conversion but of consistency. Look at your life. How consistent is your "Yes" to God?

SAY

"Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women."

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; if he does evil,
I will punish him with the rod such as men use,
with strokes such as mankind gives. 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 88:2-5, 27, 29

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.

Mother of Christ! Hear thou thy people's cry,
Star of the deep, and portal of the sky!
Mother of Him Who thee from nothing made,
Sinking we strive and call to thee for aid;
Oh, by that joy which Gabriel brought to thee,
Thou Virgin first and last, let us thy mercy see.

*(Antiphon to Our Lady for Advent and
Christmas)*