

MORNING PRAYER
THE SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT
12.08.24

From the Second Lesson: “I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word”.

With these words a young Jewish woman becomes immortal. Mary is rightly called “first among the saints” and “Queen of Heaven.” Her story is the story of all faithful servants of God. Let’s look at that story more closely.

Here is a young woman, probably in her early teens, engaged but not yet married to a man who makes a living working with his hands. Suddenly an angel appears to tell her that she is going to have a baby.

Well, that’s a surprise. Mary is a virgin, and everybody knows that it takes a man as well as a woman to produce a baby. But this is not going to be an ordinary baby. This baby is going to be fully divine as well as fully human. God will supply the divinity; Mary will supply the humanity. But the question is, “how can this be?” And the answer is, “From a human point of view, this is impossible, but trust me, God can make it happen.” So Mary says, “Okay.”

Now you and I might have some other questions, such as, “Why me? Why not some beautiful and well educated woman of the aristocracy? Why not a wealthy woman who could give this child everything? Why not a prophetess or the wife of a priest? Why select a simple peasant girl for this critical assignment?”

Well, Mary did not ask that question, perhaps because she knew the answer. As she said in the *Magnificat*, “He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of low degree.”

You see, God has a way of working with the least promising materials to accomplish His greatest work. As St. Paul says in I Corinthians, “God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.” So God chose Jacob over Esau and Isaac over Ishmael. He chose David, the youngest, to be king, over his more impressive brothers. He picked a disrespected bunch of nomads and slaves to be his chosen people. Perhaps one reason that Mary was chosen to be the mother of the Messiah is that she knew all that.

And when Jesus said, “I thank you, Father, that you have hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children,” perhaps He learned that from His mother.

Now before I go any further, I would like to say a word to the children. Children, don’t think that because you are small and have so much to learn and still depend on grown-ups to guide you and provide for you, don’t think that you are unimportant or that you can't make a difference in the world. Jesus often turned to children and offered them as examples of the kind of faith that God can work with. You have the same thing to offer God that everyone else has. You have yourself. You have your love and your obedience. That is all that anyone of any age has to offer God. Okay? Now let me get back to the adults.

We are told in the Book of Genesis that the Spirit of God moved over watery darkness at the beginning of creation. Then, as the Spirit hovered over the womb of the universe, the Word of God entered in. The darkness became light. The chaos became order. And the result was a new kind of life. You can read about that in Genesis 1.

Now that same Spirit is about to hover over the watery darkness of the Virgin’s womb, and same Word of God is about to enter in. And the Child to be born will be the progenitor of a new race of men and women.

He will be “the second Adam.” He will be “the first-born among many siblings.” He will bring light out of darkness, order out of chaos, and life out of death.

The concept of virgin birth is important precisely because it expresses and protects the divine initiative in this process of creation and salvation. The human role is a responsive one. We can respond to God’s initiative by saying “no” or by saying “yes”, but we cannot initiate the process of creation or salvation ourselves.

The sin of Eve lay in attempting to seize the initiative from God; to create an identity for herself instead of accepting the identity God gave her, and to claim the right to determine for herself what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is evil. That is what led to the disruption of the order of creation.

But Mary, as the New Eve, was content to respond to God’s initiative by saying “yes.” She could have said, “no” and God would have respected that. She would have saved herself a lot of grief and pain in this world if she had said, “no”. But Mary is exalted and glorified now precisely because she said “yes” to what God required of her. “I am the servant of the Lord, let it be to me according to your word.”

Donald Coggan, former Archbishop of Canterbury, pointed out the parallel between those words and the words of Jesus when he said to God on the eve of the crucifixion, "Not my will but yours be done." Lord Coggan suggested that Jesus learned that attitude from His mother and passed it along to us when He taught us to pray "thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." It is just such obedience to the will of God that leads through death to life and through suffering to glory.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, you and I are called to glory. Just like Mary and all the other saints, we are called to obedience. We are called to place at God's disposal, not only all that we have but all that we are. You and I are called upon to be the agents through which God does his redeeming work in the world today. We are called to receive the Word of God implanted in our midst, to nurture it, protect it and present it to the world, which is just what Mary did. Mary, you see, is the personification of the Church at its best.

The Orthodox call her "Theotokos", bearer of God. And that's what you are too when you bring the love and healing power of God to a world that is crying out for it.

Fr. Gerry Kramer once asked in Bible study, “What is the role of the Church in building the kingdom of God?” I submit to you that Mary has the answer: “I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word.”

LET US PRAY

Come, O Lord, we pray. Be with us now as we prepare for the celebration of Your Nativity, as well as for your final return as our judge and savior. Help us to know our own faults so as to make those changes, we need to make to be Your people. This we pray in Your Holy Name.

AMEN

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