

Scripture Study

Fourth Sunday of Advent – Cycle B



Opening prayer

2 Samuel 7:1-5,8b-12,14a,16 (Ps 89:2-5,27,29) Romans 16:25-27 Luke 1:26-38

Overview of the Gospel:

- The events related in this Sunday's Gospel reading take place nine months before the feast we are to celebrate in a few days—The Feast of the Nativity, or, Christmas.
- Today's reading marks the most important event that ever occurred, what is known as the *Incarnation*—the taking on of human flesh by the Second Person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ. It is known as the first Joyful Mystery of the Rosary, and is commemorated in the prayer traditionally recited three times a day, the Angelus.
- That the Messiah would be born of a virgin was prophesied in the Old Testament by Isaiah (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:22-23). Mary herself had been prepared by God for this moment.
- Though on the surface this passage might seem to be primarily about Mary, like all Marian teachings of the Church, the emphasis is really on Jesus. Here we find out (in verses 31-33) what his name will be (a name which means “God saves”), that he will be “great” (because he is God), that he will be “Son of the Most High” (i.e. God) as well as son (descendant) of the ancient Israelite king David (thus heir to the messianic promises to the Davidic throne; cf. 2 Samuel 7:12-17), and that his kingdom will have no end.
- He will also be called, in verse 33, ruler of the house of Jacob (which included all twelve tribes of Israel). At the time of Jesus, by and large, only two of the tribes (Judah and Benjamin) remained in the land, the others having been carried off into captivity in 784 B.C. The implication is that those ten tribes will be restored by drawing them from other nations. Thus Jesus' kingdom is to be a universal one, not a national one, made up of people from every time and nation.

Questions:

- In what ways was the prophecy from God to David about his kingdom and his posterity (which we hear in the 1st Reading) most literally fulfilled in Jesus Christ?
- How does the 2nd Reading make clear God's salvation was fulfilled according to his own plan?
- In the Gospel Reading, how does Gabriel's announcement to Mary compare with his announcement to Zechariah (verses 13-17)? What is different in her response?
- What truths about Jesus are emphasized in this passage? What expectations must have been raised in Mary (Luke 1:46-55, 69-79)?
- What would it mean to doubt and fear God? When were you recently fearful, but believing? How did God meet you where you were at that time?
- In what area of your life do you need to believe that “nothing will be impossible with God”? What keeps you from believing this?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 64,148, 430, 437, 486, 488-490, 494, 505, 723, 2617

Closing prayer

Mary was raised to the dignity of Mother of God rather for sinners than for the just, since Jesus Christ declares that he came to call not the just, but sinners. -St. Anselm

Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings!

"For with God nothing will be impossible"

Scripture: Luke 1:26-38

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end." And Mary said to the angel, "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" And the angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible." And Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

Meditation: God uses signs to communicate his purposes, his presence, his righteousness, his favor to his people (Psalm 86:17), and his assurance that he is speaking to them and that he will keep his promises. God also performed mighty signs to demonstrate his saving deeds when he delivered his people from bondage in Egypt (Psalm 78:43). When God offered King Ahaz a sign, the king refused. God, nonetheless, gave Israel a sign



to assure his people that he would indeed give them a Savior who would rule with peace and righteousness (Is. 7:11ff). The greatest sign God has given us is his Son Jesus Christ who took on flesh for our sake and for our salvation.

We see the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy and the unfolding of God's plan of redemption in the events leading up to the Incarnation, the birth of the Messiah. The new era of salvation begins with the conception of Jesus in the womb of Mary. This child to be born is conceived by the gracious action of the Holy Spirit upon Mary, who finds favor with God. As Eve was the mother of all humanity doomed to sin, now Mary becomes the mother of the new Adam who will father a new humanity by his grace (Romans 5:12-21). This child to be conceived in her womb is the fulfillment of all God's promises. He will be "great" and "Son of the Most High" and "King" (Luke 1:32-33), and his name shall be called "Jesus", which means "the Lord saves". "He will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). The promise of an everlasting kingdom to the house of David (Isaiah 9:6-7) is fulfilled in the King to be born in Mary's womb.

How does Mary respond to the word of God delivered by the angel Gabriel? She knows she is hearing

something beyond human capability. It will surely take a miracle which surpasses all that God has done previously. Her question, "how shall this be, since I have no husband" is not prompted by doubt or skepticism, but by wonderment! She is a true hearer of the Word and she immediately responds with faith and trust. Mary's prompt response of "yes" to the divine message is a model of faith for all believers. Mary believed God's promises even when they seemed impossible. She was full of grace because she trusted that what God said was true and would be fulfilled. She was willing and eager to do God's will, even if it seemed difficult or costly. Mary is the "mother of God" because God becomes incarnate when he takes on flesh in her womb. When we pray the Nicene Creed we state our confession of faith in this great mystery: "For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven; by the power of the Holy Spirit, he became incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and was made man". God gives us grace and he expects us to respond with the same willingness, obedience, and heartfelt trust as Mary did. When God commands he also gives the help, strength, and means to respond. We can either yield to his grace or resist and go our own way. Do you believe in God's promises and do you yield to his grace?

"Heavenly Father, you offer us abundant grace, mercy, and forgiveness through your Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ. Help me to live a grace-filled life as Mary did by believing in your promises and by giving you my unqualified "yes" to your will and plan for my life."

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