

From the Homily Library of Fr. Callistus Iyorembor

Fourth Sunday of Advent - Year B – December 20, 2020

Annunciation Gospel

One remarkable thing about Advent is we get to hear about some important Advent figures. We hear about **David**. Jesus is a descendant of David. Matthew's Gospel opens with the words *"The Book of the Genealogy of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham."*

In the past couple of Sundays, we heard about another important Advent figure, **John the Baptist**. We heard he was in the desert. He was clothed with camel hair, fed on locusts and wild honey and was baptizing people in preparation for the coming of Jesus. Profound!

Notice that because of this profundity; the great wisdom contained in his message/his witness, people mistook him for Christ, the Messiah. What stood out for me in his character, his humility. He was very humble in that he told them he was not the Messiah. He was a messenger sent to prepare the way for Christ. I love particularly what he told them. He said, *"One mightier than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals. I baptize you with water. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and Fire."*

Well, on this Fourth Sunday of Advent, the Church gives us another key Advent figure to reflect upon. Beside Jesus, this figure is the most important character. I am talking about **Mary, the Mother of Jesus**. The Gospel today is the Mystery of the Annunciation; it is how the providence of God worked in the life of Mary who is a chosen vessel of God.

"The Angel Gabriel was sent from God to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph. The woman's name was Mary." She was an agent beyond this world of time and space, from heaven, from God. He greets her using *the language of Heaven*: *"Hail Mary, full of Grace."* Every day we pray a "Hail Mary," we are engaging Heaven. We are expressing the words of the angel to Mary.

I went to Catholic high school and we had a strong devotion to our Blessed Mother. We had a tradition of saying *The Angelus*. At 6 AM, 12 Noon and 6 PM the bell would ring and – wherever we were - we would stand and pray these words. What a beautiful practice it would be for each of us to say *The Angelus* (once daily) as a New Year’s challenge? *The Angelus* - as many of you know - is a traditional Catholic prayer. It has two parts: the words of the Angel Gabriel and the ‘Hail Mary’.

Then the Angel lays out the Divine plan to Mary. He advises she is to play a significant role *“And now you will conceive in your womb and bear a Son, and you will name Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.” Luke 1:32*

Mary is puzzled. She does not understand. She has no husband. She is a virgin. She is not married. Yet the Angel tells her, *“The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.”* Then he reminds Mary of her cousin Elizabeth’s unlikely pregnancy and adds *“Elizabeth, your relative, has conceived a son in her old age. Nothing will be impossible with God.”*

Have you ever been in a situation and felt confused, not sure how it’s all going to play out and God shows up? With God all things are possible.

I want to conclude with Mary’s response. *“Let it be done to me according to your will.”* Mary’s response is our version of *“Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”*

Mary’s YES

Mary said ‘yes’ to God. Think about the various ways God is inviting you to say ‘yes’ to Him today:

- When we chose to receive the sacraments in a state of Grace we, too, are saying ‘yes’ to God.
- This season - when we reach out to someone to whom we have not yet reached out who might be struggling - we are saying ‘yes’.
-

- When we reach out to forgive people who have offended us, we are saying 'yes' to God.
- I love the tradition we have in our Parish of the Christmas giving trees. It expresses a perfect way of saying 'yes' to God.

Think about the various ways God is inviting you to say 'yes' to Him. Mary must serve as our model for how we respond to God in our lives.