

A voice cries out in the desert: listen, prepare, repent, rejoice!

If I were to ask you, “How many people know that you are here in church right now?” what would you say? Maybe three or four people, maybe a few family members or close friends. But very few people consider you important enough to know what you are doing this morning.

Well, that is exactly how it was for Mary that fateful morning when Angel Gabriel visited her. Scripture says “she was a young girl, a virgin in Nazareth, so small a town that the writer of the gospel quickly adds “in the region of Galilee”. (compare it to a town of 120 people in Northern Michigan.

But angels speak words in the wilderness of people’s lives, in Nazareth of Galilee or in Northwest Detroit...if they are listening words which will cause the world to rejoice.

What about you today, what about me? Could an angel whisper something into our ear which could change people’s lives? Could an angel whisper something into our ear that if I said YES like Mary did, it could change the world around me?

Well, about two years ago, that is just what happened. Here in Northwest Detroit an angel spoke to me; the Spirit of God whispered in my ear. I became conscious that this square mile of Detroit was not on anyone's radar. While downtown and mid-town Detroit, while Grandmont-Rosedale area and even Brightmoor was on peoples' radar for urban renewal and revitalization, the square mile in which our church is was totally being left out of any planning.

Now, when I heard God's call, I was not as totally responsive to God's invitation as Mary was. I wasn't ready to say YES all by myself. I decided to ask others about it. I suggested to the Parish Council that we use \$30,000 of funds from the Changing Lives Together Campaign to begin a square mile organization. And as Mary said YES to the angel's news. So too did the Parish Council give a resounding affirmative response. Go for it!

Then 210 households of our community said YES by making a pledge to support the neighborhood effort

Then individuals made personal commitments to help form what would become known as the O'Hair Park Community Organization.

It began with people from our church community:

- **Colleen Flaherty said YES**

Members of our parish who live in our neighborhood said YES:

- **Renee Walker**
- **Vilma Holman**
- **Vickie Bennett**
- **Brian Jennings**
- **Wenonah Handschu**

Others in our faith-community sensing an interior call to be involved

in giving rebirth to the neighborhood said yes:

- **Elaine O'Neill**
- **Mary Mathis**
- **Barbara Sylvester**

Then members from the parish became involved in the park clean ups and neighborhood celebrations.

- **Members of our Youth Group said yes!**
- **Young adults in the parish said yes!**
- **Families here said yes!**

Then people from the neighborhood and great community said YES!

- **150 people worked on the two park clean ups**
- **Forty neighbors became paid members from the organization**

Young people said YES!

- **Catholic Work Camp**
- **Presbyterian youth group**
- **Better Men Outreach**
- **Fraternity from Wayne State**

People who run businesses and organizations said YES!

- **8 Mile Business Association**
- **Mercedes Benz Financial employees**
- **Dr. Tom Dooley chapter of the Knights of Columbus**
- **Local businesses**

Something great is beginning to happen because so many people were saying YES to God.

(Pause)

Then some parishioners who had done some listening to God speaking to their hearts began challenging me with the question: “Should we not extend this kind of work in other unorganized neighborhoods of the parish?” My first response was like Mary’s. How can that be? We do not have the resources?

My brothers and sisters, angels are crying out to us all day long to say YES. Yes to bringing God’s mercy and compassion to our world. How do we respond to those voices within and without.

We should follow the example of Mary:

First, Mary listens. (expand)

Second, Mary questions?

Then Mary ponders.

And finally, Mary is not afraid to say yes!

St. Augustine says that in the spiritual life, we conceive through our ear and we give birth in our heart.

A voice cries out. With Mary may we listen and give birth to Emmanuel, God with us.