

ADVENT 2016

Mary gets our attention

This fourth Sunday gives attention to the faith of Mary. It was through her faith and her body that she brought forth the Son of God



There is a new found appreciation about the place of Mary in our salvation. First she stands as the one that God has chosen. God did not single out the rich and the powerful. He came to a young (without power), unlettered woman in a completely insignificant part of the world. This means that God will also chose all the unnoticed and insignificant people of the world as his own. What God has chosen in Mary he will chose in us.

Mary also stands as the manifestation of the power of God. Her greatness does not come from her own achievements. It first comes from the choice of God. It is God who wants her to play this very important part in the salvation of the human race. She could have refused. She could have walked away.

Mary said yes to God. She could not have known the details. She did not control how things would work out.

Know where Mary stands in our Advent

Some years ago a very devout Catholic was most offended when we clearly taught that Mary is one of us (i.e., human). In all her good intentions this woman had great difficulty that Mary stands on the side with all us humans. She is one of us.

And that is the great marvel of Mary. We have concluded that whatever you say about Mary you are also speaking about our faith life. Each of the doctrines of Mary speaks about today's believer.

We believe that great things happened through the faith and the body of Mary. She stands as one of the little ones of God. She is without power. Her strength is her faith and trust in God.

What we say about Mary we must now say about ourselves.

GOD DID NOT ASK MARY IF SHE WAS PREPARED FOR THIS NEW MISSION

Listen to what ordinary people (who hardly ever share in the prayer and the worship of the faith community) consider religion to be. They will point to the church building in their district, rites of passage such as infant baptism and funerals. Observe that they do not describe religion as the working of God among us. These people are very sincere. They name what they know and are disappointed when you point out that 'religion is not that stuff.'

God did not ask people to be prepared. Rather, God burst in unexpectedly to the life of the unlettered girl named Mary. Notice that God comes to a working young woman. She stands as a person with calluses on her hands.

Religion is paying attention to the inbreaking of God. The Spirit of God is ever at work in our lives and our country. Our job is to pay attention.

The very Son of God came to birth through the faith and the body of Mary. Her cooperation with God was very much part of the great event

of salvation. God did not overpower her and force her against her will.

Rather, the Holy Spirit called Mary to trust in the faithfulness of God to work in her life. The virgin birth means that God first and foremost works in the life of this unlettered young woman.

Now, the next step is that God works in your life. God comes unexpectedly in so many ways. We are challenged daily to pay attention to the coming of God among us.

**HOW DOES GOD ENTER INTO YOUR LIFE?**

Always think of the Holy Spirit as the very air you breathe. Very seldom do you pay attention to your breathing but it is absolutely essential to your life, moment by moment. If you live in a city that is suffering smog with all kinds of toxic chemicals floating about in the air, your lungs will suffer greatly.

Now, stop for just a moment. Take a deep breath. Does it not feel wonderful that you can breathe clean air and that your lungs work well?

The Holy Spirit is the very air you breathe.

The Holy Spirit is lifting you out of selfishness and self-centeredness to pay attention to the suffering of others. Instead of talking about yourself and your own concerns, you breathe in the love and compassion of the Holy Spirit for all human beings. The very breath of the Holy Spirit is expanding the boundaries of

your life. Perhaps instead of being overly preoccupied with your own projects you are being moved to listen to the confusion of your twenty-two year old granddaughter.

The Holy Spirit is moving you out of your comfort zone to walk with this granddaughter in her troubled season.

If the Holy Spirit moved in the life of Mary, the Holy Spirit is moving in your life.

SAY YES TO GOD IN YOUR DAILY LIFE

The mystery of Christmas is bringing a new and powerful awareness to our Christian life. We must see of life in the life-giving and generative terms of a mother giving birth to her child.

As Mary gives birth to the very Son of God, now each believer, must give birth to Christ in our very lives. The mystery of Bethlehem must now happen in your life.

It is never sufficient to claim “I believe.” Now, the mystery of the coming of the Son of God must happen within you. Your life, your spirit and energy, must give birth to Christ.

There was a definite historical moment when the Son of God was born in Bethlehem. But that is not sufficient. Now, the Son of God must be born in the life of every believer.

The Son of God must be born into your life as you also trust God in all things. Perhaps you have receive a diagnosis of cancer. Seek to say yes to God in all things through this very treatment.

The poor come to us in so many different ways. Say yes to God by your care and concern

for their difficulties and sufferings. These poor, these people directly in front of you, are a moment to say yes to God.

As Mary said yes to God, so now we are being challenged to recognize the coming of God in the faces of these poor with their many faces.

The yes to God is a daily event. It happens within your own time and space.



BETHLEHEM MUST BE YOUR HOME



There is a wise woman who recommended that we all go home, take everything hanging in our closets, turn each garment inside out. After four months, if any garment is still hanging inside out, it means

that you will never wear it again. It is just so much stuff taking up space. If you pack all these garments up and forward them to the clothes depot, you will never miss them. Simply put, so much in our closets is clutter, not useful clothing.

There are a lot of pieces of our religious story that needs to be given the same test. Take our concept of Bethlehem. We have such sweet memories of the place where Jesus was born. Hang what you remember of it inside out!

The real Bethlehem was a holding yard for the overflow of visitors. There was nothing glamorous or comfortable about it. No one had a private bathroom. It was a very public space. The poor, or people with very limited means would reside there.

Now, in this very ordinary space, the Son of God was born. Right in the midst of smelly, busy and bickering humanity.

Now Christ must come in the ordinariness of your life.

MAY YOUR LIFE BE A BETHLEHEM



Bethlehem is never a past event. It is always a present moment .

As we are so close to Christmas plan that your heart is Bethlehem. Prepare to receive the very Son of God in your life. Make your interior a place of welcome for the very Son of God.

Open your heart to the great love that God has for each and every human being. Open your heart to the person at work who has need of a little more attention and encouragement. Maybe they give up too easy. Be the light that encourages them as they try to build their life.

Make your heart a Bethlehem to the relative who is trying to enter into a sober lifestyle. They are trying to fight their demons of addiction

to alcohol, illegal drugs and prescription drugs. Make your heart open to receive the son of God in the poor and the struggling.

Make your time the yard of Bethlehem as you give some time to your aged aunt who knows no one anymore. She is cared for in the care home. All her physical needs are well taken care of but she needs so much the kindness of the human touch of her niece. Make your time with her a Bethlehem moment. Prepare the ground to receive the Son of God.

HAVE YOUR FAMILY STAND AROUND THE ADVENT WREATH

The fourth candle calls each member of the family to be attentive to the needs and sufferings of the other members of the family. Our focus extends to the entire family.

Touch the fourth candle. This means that you are trying to see the good that each member of your family is doing.



Touch the fourth candle again. What are the times of unforgiveness in your family?

With the fourth candle remind yourself where your family has been a source of healing and peace to the rest of the family.