

**ECHOING GOD'S WORD  
IN THE  
CATHOLIC COMMUNITY  
FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT  
DECEMBER 24, 2023**

**SCRIPTURES:**

**2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-11,16**

**Romans 16:25-27**

**Luke 1:26-38**

**God will build an eternal kingdom for David.**

**What was a mystery for ages is now revealed.**

**The Word of God comes to Mary.**

**READ THE SCRIPTURES:**

*Read the three Scripture passages given in the Lectionary for this weekend. Begin with the Gospel, since the other readings are always chosen in terms of the Gospel reading. (The second reading does not always have the same theme as the Gospel and the first reading. The first reading will be directly related to the Gospel in its content.) Repeat the Gospel reading. Remember that the word of God in the Bible is primarily addressed to the faith community and does not necessarily answer any questions that an individual may have. We simply ask, "What message does the Church (or this faith-sharing group or this family) need to hear?" We listen to the word with that question in mind.*

**Luke:**

Luke and Matthew provide infancy narratives concerning Jesus. Mark and John do not. Luke intends to show that the marvelous events surrounding the birth of Jesus already give evidence that God is at work in this man. Luke is *theologian* rather than *historian* in the present-day meaning of these words. His intention is to communicate religious truth and not merely the raw data of history. His book is intended as a witness to the works of God in Jesus Christ, not just as an objective, detached report on what happened.

Miraculous births mean supernatural interventions. "God is at work here!" is the message. "This is no mere human event."

Wondrous things happen in and through women in Luke's Gospel. They are the willing servants of the Lord God. The Holy Spirit works out God's power and purpose. Women seem to be ready for God's work in their lives, since they do not rely primarily on their own power, prestige, strength, and status. In that culture, they did not have any of these. So, there was room for God in them!

The angel here is Gabriel, the same who in the Book of Daniel announces the fulfillment of salvation (Daniel 9:20-25). Now, again, salvation will come to the human race. Since Mary has no power to achieve God's purposes on her own, she will open herself up to the indwelling of God's Spirit. Notice how it is said that she will be "overshadowed" by the Holy Spirit. The result is a new creation, as it was under the power of the Spirit in the Book of Genesis (See Genesis 1:2). The result is a renewal of creation, as it was under the cloud in the Desert of Sinai (See Exodus 40:34).

The One to be born will be called "Son of God," that is, he will have a right relationship with God, just as a son has with a father. Later, he will be called "Son of Man," again, from the Book of Daniel, meaning he will have a right relationship with the human race. This is Luke's Gospel in miniature: God is gracious in Jesus Christ through the powerful movement of the Holy Spirit. Mary becomes the first disciple: the first to respond with humility and obedience. It is now up to us to *conceive* and to *nurture* the life of God in our own lives. By the initiative and the power of God's Holy Spirit, we bring Christ to a world from which he is largely shut out. The Church *conceives* and *gives birth*, the power of the Holy Spirit, to spiritual offspring and spiritual works that bring glory to God and establish the kingdom on earth.

### **Samuel:**

1 & 2 Samuel were originally one book in the Hebrew Scriptures. It was written most probably during the reign of King Solomon as a history of the royal court and was meant to establish the dynasty of King David, Solomon's father, on solid historical and religious foundations. The point of the passage we proclaim today is that God is making a covenant with David: God will be faithful; David and his descendants are invited to be faithful. The words "house of David" have several meanings: palace, temple, dynasty, family status. After the overthrow of the monarchy when no descendent of David sat on the throne of Israel, the covenant with David came to be understood in terms of a future ideal king from the line of David, eventually being seen as the promise of a Messiah.

### **Romans:**

The Book of Romans closes with a *doxology*, a short hymn of praise to God. Paul interprets the prophecies of the Jewish Scriptures as having pointed to Jesus

Christ in some veiled or mysterious way. Now, he says, the revelation of God is made clear in Jesus. Jesus is the Christ, the Anointed One of God. The Holy Spirit now makes it possible for believers to see in retrospect the full meaning of the prophets of old.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What can we learn about Mary from this passage? Describe the values that seem to guide her everyday life. Be real about evaluating her concerns. What kind of personality did she have? What were some of her religious beliefs? Where was the center of her attention? What other things were also part of her attention, if not at the center? Compare her concerns with those of the Church today. Are there differences? Why?
2. What are the traditional “feminine” qualities that are offered to us for imitation here? How can these typically feminine traits be incorporated into the personalities of Christian men? How can they be seen as *complementing* the usual masculine traits? Are men to be considered less masculine when they absorb and live out the characteristics of the Virgin Mary?
3. Study the response of Mary to the Lord’s invitation. What elements does it contain that we would do well to incorporate into our prayers and into our response to God’s call? Do you see eagerness to do God’s will in your own life, in the life of your family, in the life of the Church? Do you see a concern that *without* God’s power, we can do nothing? Are we satisfied that we can and should proceed once we have heard God’s answer to our questions?

### SUGGESTION FOR CHRISTIAN ACTION

Commitment to God results in acts of Christian ministry or service. A group or a parish is not really a Christian community unless it engages regularly in corporate actions that serve the reign of God: evangelization, celebration or worship, and service to the world which God has made. A group that seeks to become a Christian Community must choose a ministry or a service that it can render together, to engage itself in the works of mercy.

## PRAYER

Mary said: “I am the servant of the Lord. Let it happen to me as you have said.” During Advent, as Christmas comes near, we say: **“I am your servant, Lord. Do in me and through me whatever you will!”**

## CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

The Catholic Church teaches that by the grace of God we are transformed from a state of alienation from God to a state of righteousness with God. (The traditional words are *state of sin* and *state of grace*.) We take each of these words seriously. *Grace* literally means *gift*. Now, a gift is never earned. If we work for a gift, it is no longer a gift; it is a wage. We truly believe that God has freely chosen to transform us from sinfulness to righteousness, not because we deserve it or have earned it but only because God chooses to do so for us out of love freely given.

We do not become *right with God* because of our actions, prayers, good deeds, penances, or through any other process that is *ours*. We become right with God only through the love of God given us because of the merits of Jesus Christ our Savior. The power of the death and resurrection of Christ is the basis of our salvation; nothing else.

To be *right with God* is called the state of grace. We are in a condition of having been gifted by God. This gift given because of the merits of Jesus Christ consists in the very life of God created by God and imparted by God and abiding in us. At the very roots of our being, we have come to live in the power of the Holy Spirit and are able to do righteous acts. The state of grace makes it possible for us to do actions that are holy. Our behavior can be holy because holiness has been imparted to our very being.

Of course, we are still capable of sin if we deliberately choose to act contrary to the will of God. We can sin, but our humanness is not sinful in itself. By grace, we become partners with God in bringing God’s very holiness to all that we touch. We may choose to separate ourselves from the grace (gift) of God by deliberate and willful opposition to the will of God. We lose the state of grace when we choose to turn away from God in matters that are serious. Mortal sin is that kind of choice that repudiates God’s grace and leaves us “ungraced” or in a mortal or

deadly condition. When we have lost the *life of God in us* which is *grace*, then we are *dead* or in a state of mortal sin.

At the very core of the Catholic tradition stands this belief and this teaching. God's grace makes us good and acceptable to God. We are transformed by grace into holiness which comes from God. Holiness is not ours by nature. It is a gift from God, given and added to our humanness. The theologians say that *grace perfects nature*. The grace of God is not only very compatible with our human natures but actually brings our human nature to a sharing in the divine nature. Some Christians are very much opposed to this teaching.

**See: The Catechism: # 1987-2029**

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