

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON (or a hymn) Drop down dew from above, you heavens, and let the clouds rain down the Just One; let the earth be opened and bring forth a Saviour.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM (Ps 88)

ANTIPHON: For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.

RESPONSE: For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.

LECTOR: I will sing for ever of your love, O Lord; through all ages my mouth will proclaim your truth. Of this I am sure, that your love lasts for ever, that your truth is firmly established as the heavens. **R.**

LECTOR: "I have made a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn to David my servant: I will establish your dynasty for ever and set up your throne through all ages." **R.**

LECTOR: He will say to me: "You are my father, my God, the rock who saves me." I will keep my love for him always; for him my covenant shall endure. **R.**

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION Alleluia, alleluia! I am the servant of the Lord: may his will for me be done. Alleluia!

COMMUNION ANTIPHON (or a hymn) Behold, a Virgin shall conceive and bear a son; and his name will be called Emmanuel.

TODAY'S READINGS 2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-12, 14, 16; Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38

NEXT WEEK (Holy Family Year B) Sir 3: 2-6, 12-14; Col 3: 12-21; Luke 2:22-40

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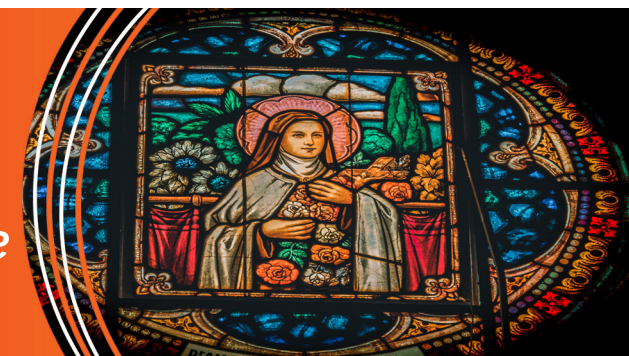
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*Like Mary we
are called to be
prophets*



Stainglass image of Mary: Nany Casteleira

24 December 2023 4th Sunday Advent Year B

In preparation for the birth of Jesus tomorrow, we celebrate the Annunciation, the announcement to Mary that she is being invited to become the mother of the Saviour. Moreover, today we hear the story in the Gospel of Luke who portrays Mary as a true believer and first disciple of Jesus. While Mary is not a disciple like the Twelve who accompany Jesus in his ministry, she is presented as the true disciple who hears the Word of God and acts upon it.

Birth announcements play a significant role in the Hebrew Scriptures turning supposed barren wombs into surprising conceptions: Ishmael is born to Hagar; Isaac to Abraham and Sarah; John the Baptist to Zechariah and Elizabeth ["She who was thought to be barren is now in her sixth month!"]. Israel's God is ever full of surprises!

The telling of the Annunciation story is also significant because it follows the pattern of the calling of the Jewish prophets (e.g., Moses and Jeremiah): there is a heavenly messenger or angel; the 'prophet' expresses fear but is told to not be afraid; God's intention is announced; objections are given; finally, a sign of divine power is presented.

Mary's objection to the idea of bearing a son is grounded in biological reality: "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel's answer is that the Holy Spirit will overshadow her and enable this 'miracle' to occur in the same manner the Spirit hovered over the waters

at the origin of creation. This same Spirit was again present at the baptism and transfiguration of Jesus.

Mary's final response – "I am the handmaid of the Lord; let what you have said be done to me" – is not an expression of passive servitude. Mary's fiat ('let it be done') demonstrates a conscious and active faith; and it shows an almost outrageous authority as she first questions the angel before making a decision that implies enormous risk and danger. After all, if the law of Deuteronomy was applied, as an unwed mother Mary could be stoned to death!

The birth of the Lord in human flesh coming into the world to deliver us from power and greed relies on this poor, peasant Jewish woman saying yes to God's invitation. Certainly, Mary's call is unique insofar as she alone is invited to conceive and deliver Jesus. Yet, like Mary, we are all called to give Jesus Christ in our own lives.

God's gracious care and desire to repair our lives and planet earth is occurring today. Do we have Mary's faith, hope and courage to say "Yes" to the divine invitation to be missionary disciples of Jesus in the way of Mary. Like Mary, we are all called to be prophets, people who denounce the world's injustices, and cry out to God to bring peace and reconciliation to all peoples. As we prepare to celebrate the coming of Christ may we, like Mary, learn to hear the Word of God and put it into practice.

Gerard Hall SM

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