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December 2008

ORIENTATION

The Gospel for the Fourth Sunday of Advent is the Annunciation. St. Luke puts Mary before us as a model of true discipleship. Mary's response to God's call is one of total trust, total self-giving: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Although Mary is a main player in the story, the purpose of the Gospel is always to teach us something about Jesus. Jesus' birth and infancy stories are responding to the question, "Who is Jesus?" They teach a post-resurrection understanding that Jesus is God's own son and the fulfillment of all of God's promises to the chosen people.

GOSPEL

The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, "Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you." But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

"Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" And the angel said to her in reply, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God." Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her. [Lk 1:26-38](#)

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- If you had been Mary, what would have been hardest to comprehend?
- How do you think Mary felt about giving birth to the Messiah?
- Why do you think that Gabriel told Mary about Elizabeth's good news?
- If an angel today were to reveal God's plan for your life, what would you do?
- What about Jesus stands out to you the most?
- How did you come to an understanding of who Jesus is?
- How would you describe your relationship with Jesus Christ now?

PRAYER

That God became man (the Incarnation) is the miracle of all miracles. He did not come as a powerful, invincible warrior (as the Jewish people had expected), but as a little baby crying in a stable.

READ THE GOSPEL SLOWLY: Watch how Gabriel greets Mary. Watch how Mary responds to Gabriel.

REPETITION 2: As you re-read the Annunciation story, let yourself hear the words of the angel be spoken to you. How are you "full of grace?" How is the Lord "with you?" How are you "blessed among women?"

REPETITION 3: As you re-read the story this one last time, let your mind and heart wander to a word or phrase that stands out to you. How is it comforting or challenging you? Talk to Jesus about what the word or phrase is stirring up in you?

ST. JULIE SAYS

"Let us be born anew with our good Jesus in the crib: let us strip ourselves of the old Adam to be clothed again with the new. Let us go to Bethlehem with the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph to study thre the lessons of humility and poverty they preach."—St. Julie Billiart, Foundress of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur

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