



CATHOLIC CONVERSATIONS ON THE SCRIPTURES

Archdiocese of Miami - Ministry of Christian Formation

December 21, 2014 Fourth Sunday of Advent

Gospel reading Luke 1:26-38 *[To be read aloud]*

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.

Brief commentary:

At the threshold of the feast of the Nativity of the Lord, the readings today remind us that the birth of Jesus Christ was prepared for, foretold long before, and it is thus the fulfillment of the divine promise. In the first reading the one whom Israelites will remember as their greatest and ideal king (David) desires to build a 'house' – a temple – to Yahweh, just as all nations built temples to their gods. Instead, in a vision, the LORD promises David that his lineage and throne will endure forever. The psalmist also expresses this royal ideology, which became the basis for the Jewish hope in the ultimate anointed of God, the Messiah. He does so by recalling the promise made to David by the God who keeps his promises. The gospel reading also recalls how the story of the life of Jesus began nine months earlier, with the annunciation to Mary. By reading from the Lucan text – read on the feast of the Annunciation, on March 25th – we recall that the promise made to David and to the people Israel, was fulfilled at the Incarnation of the Son of God. Just as Isaiah and John the Baptist have been prophetic figures addressing us this Advent season, now – so close to Christmas – the gospel reading presents to us Mary and Joseph of Nazareth, descendent of king David. Mary, the young Jewess of the Galilean hamlet of Nazareth, responds with faith to the revelation from God's messenger, Gabriel. Gabriel's greeting to Mary startles her, but as the dialogue continues Mary begins to understand the mission she is being called to. And despite the difficulties ahead, she gives herself totally to the plan of One whose grace had filled her life. It has been said that Mary's "yes" is the new beginning of the human race: "Fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum" ("Let it be done to me in accord with your word!"). And, as the prologue to John's gospel will proclaim on Christmas day, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...and the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." Mary's "yes" to God in faith and love is the reversal of Eve's "no". Luke's account of the entrance of Jesus into the world recalls the promises to David, of a descendant ruling eternally. Thus, the birth of Jesus, far from being a random event, is at the heart of God's providential plan for Israel, for the human race, and for all Creation. As we draw near to Christmas, may the example of Mary inspire us to hear the Word of God, believe in God's power to save, and respond to the grace of his Holy Spirit with our total trust and self-donation to God and to God's plan for the world. Relying on her maternal intercession and that of Joseph, may we too say to God, "I am your servant...let it be done to me according to your word," and may we thus become witnesses of the Incarnation of the Son of God – the Lord our Savior – in our world and in our lives.

Today's reading offers significant messages:

- As we draw near to Christmas we remember that the coming of the Son of God into the world is at the heart of God's plan and promise.
- Like Mary, we too have heard the Gospel of 'Immanu-el', of 'God with us'. Like Mary, we are called to respond with faith, hope and love.
- Inspired by Mary's example, and confident in her help, we too say to the Holy Spirit: "I am your servant, o Lord, and of your plan; may your will be done in me and through me, on earth as it is in heaven."

For our shared or personal reflection:

After a brief pause for silent reflection share your answers, ideas or feelings.

- How am I preparing spiritually to celebrate the Nativity of the Lord?
- How has the grace of God touched my life? How have I responded?
- How can I be the servant/handmaid of the Lord and of his saving plan in my family, workplace, community, parish, society, world?

Suggested readings: Catechism of the Catholic Church paragraphs 484-86, 525-26, 502-07