



FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT
Year B

Luke 1:26-38

26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, **27** to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. **28** He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, so highly favoured! The Lord is with you.' **29** She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, **30** but the angel said to her, 'Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favour. **31** Listen! You are to conceive and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. **32** He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; **33** he will rule over the House of Jacob for ever and his reign will have no end.' **34** Mary said to the angel, 'But how can this come about, since I am a virgin?' **35** 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you,' the angel answered, 'and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God. **36** Know this too: your kinswoman Elizabeth has, in her old age, herself conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, **37** for nothing is impossible to God.' **38** 'I am the handmaid of the Lord,' said Mary, 'let what you have said be done to me.' And the angel left her.

Other readings: 2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-12, 14, 16 Psalm 88 (89) Romans 16:25-27

Our gospel reading is the story traditionally called 'the Annunciation'. Luke in fact begins his gospel with two annunciations, the first to Zechariah about the coming birth of his son John the Baptist, and the second to Mary. In both passages the angel announces a birth and speaks of the greatness of the one who is to be born. In the case of Jesus: 'He will be called Son of the Most High.'

What lies at the very heart of this passage is the request of God to Mary and her generous response, by which she allows the Son of God to become a human being within her. Mary hears the word of God and accepts the gift of the child, who is the Word, the Son of God. Paintings of the Annunciation often show Mary at prayer with the book of the Scriptures close by. She has come to know God through prayerful engagement with the Scriptures, and, at this crucial moment in the history of salvation, she responds generously to the call of God in her heart.

Mary was not aware where this would lead her. The words 'I am the handmaid of the Lord' are filled with trust that, whatever lies ahead, God will give her the grace to remain faithful. This willingness to do God's will makes her the first of the disciples of Jesus, and the Mother of the Church.

How can I be a faithful servant of the Lord, as Mary was?

What does this moment of the Incarnation mean to me?

Let us pray for trust and perseverance amid the trials which face us.

Let us always be grateful for the wonderful deeds of God.