

Homily. 4th Sunday in Advent. Year.B. 19/20 December 2020.

The story of the Annunciation to Mary tells us about this young woman's humanity and about her trust in God. St. Luke doesn't hold back when he says that the arrival and opening message of the Angel Gabriel deeply disturbed Mary's clam, and why wouldn't it? I'm sure all of us would at the least be deeply disturbed if we were in Mary's shoes. Wherever Mary was and whatever she was doing at that time was brought to an abrupt halt by the appearance and the words of God's Angelic messenger.

Unlike you and I who may well have run away screaming or carted ourselves off to a therapist in such a situation, Luke says that Mary grabbed this unexpected halt in her routine to ponder what Gabriel's greeting could mean. In other words, from the outset Mary paid attention to what was happening, odd and difficult as that was. When Gabriel told her to not be frightened and to listen she was already a step ahead, giving her entire self and her awareness to this divine moment. Mary was expecting grace, not judgement or condemnation, a promise not a reprimand, and she soon found out how great a promise and grace that was to be.

God always wants to work with us because love which is the essence of God works that way, never imposing or demanding, but asking, offering, entreating and enticing us to freely co-operate with God's will and plan. Humanly enough, Mary wanted to know how she could possibly be a mother when she had not known a man. I'm not confident that Gabriel's words about the coming upon and over-shadowing of her by the Holy Spirit fully made sense to her. I'm much more certain that Mary with all of

her humanity, doubts and unanswered questions, by her attentive listening, made a strong and total 'Yes' to what God was asking of her despite all that as yet remained unknown. The sudden departure of Gabriel tells us this much. As St. Luke says, after Mary's agreement, job done and mission accomplished, the Angel left her.

King David had plans for building of the 1st Jerusalem Temple, but God's plans were different. David, a most fallible and human King, listened to the message of God given by Nathan the prophet. He would never build the Temple, for that was work his son, Solomon, to do. Mary had her plans for an ordinary life with Joseph, her betrothed, a life as a wife and mother in obscurity far from politics and the public gaze. When God's Angel came asking her in highfalutin words to become the mother of the Son of the Most High who would sit on the throne of his ancestor David and rule over the house of Israel forever, Mary accepted this invitation, putting all of her plans and dreams aside so as to serve all of us.

In this broken year of too many surprises and more than a few shocks to our own plans and dreams, how have we gone with our listening to God? Like David and Mary, attentive and open? Or like crazy people riddled with fear, defensiveness and selfishness? What we know for sure is that the first way leads to life and hope for many; the other to frustration and futility for us. Make it a point to consider the listening way of Mary and David in these few days before we celebrate the birth and gift of the Lord.