



Bringing Home the Word

Fourth Sunday of Advent | December 24, 2017

Welcoming Our Lord

By Mary Katharine Deeley

In the whole of the New Testament, Mary appears only a handful of times. She is, of course, present at the birth of Jesus and at his death. She comes looking for her son in the Temple when he's twelve and again when he's preaching. She lets him know that the time has come for his first miracle when he's in Cana.

She has more to say in this story of the annunciation than in any of the others, and in this one story we get more than a glimpse of the woman she would become in our memory—called on by

millions, revered by all—an example of unparalleled obedience and openness to the movement of God in her life.

It strikes me that, along with being the Mother of God (the Orthodox Church uses the word *theotokos*, which means “God-bearer”), Mary is our example of the best response to the presence of God. We let him in; we show God hospitality in our very being; we allow God to change our lives in ways we cannot even imagine yet.

The reality for most of us, though, is that in many times and places we have had the chance to welcome God in. Instead, we've shut God out because we thought something else was more important. Maybe it was power or wealth. Perhaps God was challenging us to move on a particular path, and we didn't want to.

Maybe our question for the week is, *what would happen if I do as God asks?*

On this Christmas Eve, let us practice saying yes to God—for in doing this, we honor the mother of us all. +

*By being open to Jesus,
we honor our Mother.*

A Word From Pope Francis

[Joseph and Mary in Bethlehem]...were alone, in a strange land, just the three of them. Then...people began to appear: shepherds, people just like them who had to leave their homes to find better opportunities for their families....When they heard that Jesus had been born, they went to see him. They became neighbors....a family to Mary and Joseph, the family of Jesus. This is what happens when Jesus comes into our lives....He makes us neighbors.

—Address in Bañado Norte, a Paraguay slum, July 12, 2015



Sunday Readings

2 Samuel 7:1–5, 8b–12, 14a, 16

“I was with you wherever you went, and I cut down all your enemies before you.”

Romans 16:25–27

To the only wise God, through Jesus Christ be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Luke 1:26–38

“Mary said, ‘Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.’”

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Is giving myself to God in prayer a way to let him accomplish his dreams in me?
- How can I offer hospitality in my heart, my home, my work, and my Church so that others can encounter God's love?



Elected By God

By Richard Rohr, OFM

God is always selecting people in the Bible, but in disconcerting ways. There seems to be no previous preparation or proven holiness—often not even willingness among those specially chosen.

Biblical chosenness does not seem to mean that we are anything special; instead, it reminds us of the specialness all creatures share. It is seldom saying we are especially good; it is always saying God is good. It is never saying that we are inherently qualified for chosenness, but says that God wants to give us an experience of unearned chosenness or “beloved” status. That way we can know what chosenness really feels like, and can better communicate that experience to others.

Starting with the Chosen People themselves, beloved status prepares them to communicate it to the whole world. God chose the Jews not because he loved them better than anybody, but to lead them through a forty-year training exercise so they could be a transformative template that would challenge all religion in every age.

Yet the history of religion is that most of us refuse to go on the full journey and, instead, stay deadlocked at early-stage superiority. We somehow believe that we are chosen, right, saved. But often, this belief does not progress into a generative

journey for others—a sympathy for others’ journeys or belief in the beauty of other religions.

Biblical election is an inclusive chosenness because it is dealing with an infinite God in whom all things cohere. Egocentric chosenness is always exclusive and arrogant, as if there wasn’t enough to go around.

Mary: Archetype of Chosenness

All the chosen figures I know from the Bible—Moses, Jacob, Joseph, Esther, Judith, Peter, Paul—are flawed individuals unprepared for God’s call. They are chosen in their lowliness. There is only one case where the pattern is seemingly different, although it is not really different as much as distilled, concise, and utterly clear.

Mary, the Mother of Jesus, is the archetype of chosenness. The Greek word that is used when Gabriel visits Mary (Luke 1:29) is a rare verb form that could be translated: “Hail, Chosenness Itself!” Favor says much more about the one doing the favoring than the one receiving the favor. All we can do is receive chosenness. All we can do is accept that we are accepted, which is harder than we think! This becomes the central biblical theme of grace.

Ideal Vessel

Until Mary, most of the central chosen

Bible figures were men. In Mary we have the ideal vessel, who personifies the state of perfectly received favor from God. There is nothing in the biblical text that says she was worthy, prepared, or had earned this favor. It is given by God, and her glory is that she accepts being used as a “handmaid.”

Mary knows her Jewish tradition, and knows how God works. She knows how Yahweh, the God of Israel, consistently chooses an enslaved race, forgotten sons, barren women, and unprepared laypeople so they can revel in their totally gratuitous election. And God gets all the glory! Mary knows that it is always a statement of God’s goodness, not ours. As some later mystics put it, it is almost as if God was waiting for a perfectly receptive bride—and God found her in Mary of Nazareth. She receives the Divine Kiss, and swoons in gratitude and fertility: Jesus. That is all. That is everything.

“The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name” (Luke 1:49) becomes her motto. Mary looked at God’s goodness and refused to be preoccupied with her own. +

PRAYER

Lord, you have called us to be your instruments of peace and reconciliation in the world. Give me the courage to make peace with those who have hurt me and caused me pain.

From *Joyful Meditations for Every Day of Advent and the 12 Days of Christmas*,

Rev. Warren J. Savage and
Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

December 25-30

Mon. Christmas: Is 52:7–10 /
Heb 1:1–6 / Jn 1:1–18 or 1:1–5, 9–14
Tue. St. Stephen: Acts 6:8–10; 7:54–59 /
Mt 10:17–22
Wed. St. John: 1 Jn 1:1–4 / Jn 20:1a, 2–8

Thu. The Holy Innocents:
1 Jn 1:5–2:2 / Mt 2:13–18
Fri. Octave of Christmas:
1 Jn 2:3–11 / Lk 2:22–35
Sat. Octave of Christmas:
1 Jn 2:12–17 / Lk 2:36–40

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