

**Homily for December 22, 2002
4th Sunday of Advent B**

By Father Charles Bowes

**2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16
Romans 16:25-27
Luke 1:26-38**

We, like Mary, in meeting Jesus, meet no less than God.

These wonderful stories which surround the birth of Jesus contain a hope and inspire a confidence far deeper than the stories themselves.

Composed long after the events of Jesus' death and resurrection and ascension, these narratives are yet another way in which the early Christian community tries to help folks like you and me experience the Christ, the holy one of God, who brings life and overcomes death. While on the surface this gospel story of Luke chapter one seems to talk about Mary, beneath it all it answers the question of who Jesus is and how Jesus relates to God. Mary's function in this story is that of a theologian who goes to the limit of human hope and asks if God has something to say. We believers know the answer because that's what brings us here today. Mary becomes the model of every disciple by her response to the revelation of God's closeness in Jesus.

Just as the angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah to announce the birth of John the Baptist, so now he appears to Mary to announce the birth of Jesus. Even though the birth of John the Baptist to elderly parents was quite remarkable, the birth of Jesus will surpass that event at every point. An angel's announcement to

Mary is totally incomprehensible to her – she doesn't understand it and isn't meant to understand it – see, she simply trusts, has faith – like every good disciple. No mention is made of Joseph or a wedding. For a young virgin betrothed to be married, this message had to sound both impossible and disastrous. How could anyone understand this message as being favored by God? Such an event would be for her and her family a public and private disgrace. Her only response is deep bewilderment. The angel tries to explain how this miraculous event is going to happen through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is totally an act of God – nothing less. Those who meet Jesus will meet no less than God. It might not make sense, but neither did the earlier announcement about the birth of John the Baptist that Elizabeth is now in her sixth month. And Mary turns her future over to God's plan, not because she fully understands, but because she believes.

And what did Mary do according to the narrative? She closed her curtains. She closed her windows, her doors, and her house. She did this not to lock herself up, considering herself a kind of living tabernacle with that treasure in her womb – putting, so to speak, two candles and some flowers in front of herself, meditating day and night about her privileged position (or possession?).

No, she closed her curtains, her windows, her doors and her house to do something else. She went out to visit her cousin Elizabeth. What happened to her was not going to be only a private issue.

Her “yes” was the beginning of all and everything that would happen to her during the rest of her life. Just like our “yes” to Jesus in Holy Communion and at baptism are the beginning of all and everything that happen during the rest of our lives. Mary’s “yes” to the angel enfleshing Jesus is our “yes” to Jesus in Holy Communion at every Mass and every Eucharist. Just as Mary carried the Lord to the world outside of the safety of her family, so do we carry the Lord beyond this place into every nook and cranny and meeting and obligation and fear and success that we encounter. This is what the Kingdom of God means.

Those who encounter Jesus encounter no less than God. Those who encounter Jesus’ followers meet no less than God. Mary was carrying the seed of all change in this world and so do we. In visiting her cousin Elizabeth, Mary erupted in that famous expression, “Look what happened to me. In me it is clear that God is going to change the whole order of things. It is through me that God showed that his world is going to change!”

It is through us that the world changes today, and the power of that change is God-given and God-driven because the Lord is with us. Rejoice in such a great faith we share with the mother of God, and draw comfort from that faith.

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