

MARY & OURSELVES AT CHRISTMAS
FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT (YEAR B) – 20 December 2020



Annunciation (c. 1472–1475), by Leonardo da Vinci | public domain | edited www.stjosephsbrackenridge.com

CHRISTMAS IS ABOUT JESUS

We bring many expectations to Christmas.
Some we place on ourselves,
some our families and friends place on us,
and some expectations, society and culture place on us.

But Christmas is really about Jesus.

We would think it strange that we go to someone's birthday party and ignore him or her,
never find time for him or her, walk past that person at the door,
and show no recognition, no gratitude for all that person has done for us.

Christmas is our celebration of the Birth of Jesus.

We welcome and encounter Jesus this Christmas. We spend time with Jesus.
We welcome Jesus not only into our lives but into our very ourselves.

FIJI

This year, we remember people in several regions of Fiji after the recent category 5 Cyclone Yasa.

It was their second category 5 cyclone this year. Category 5 is the highest category.

Australians remember Cyclone Tracy in 1974 that flattened Darwin – it was a category 4.
Yet Fiji twice this year has suffered more intense cyclones than Tracy.

We pray this Christmas for many Fijian people who lost housing, crops, schools, health centres, communication facilities, and many other necessities.
Some lost their reserve food for the weeks ahead.

We think of Mary in the Gospels, as we pray for expectant mothers in Fiji this Christmas.
We think of Joseph in the Gospels, as we pray for Fijian people who have lost their homes and are seeking a place to rest. <https://bit.ly/PrayerforFiji17122020>

MARY

Today's Gospel passage shares an event nine months before the first Christmas. It is in the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy. God has blessed Elizabeth and Zechariah. Now God sends the angel Gabriel to Elizabeth's kinswoman, Mary.

Luke's Gospel in 1:26-28 says:

"In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you'."

Mary's listens and hears,
she clarifies,
she wonders,
she welcomes,
and responds in Luke 1:38,

"Here I am, the servant of the Lord, let it be with me according to your word."

This welcome becomes a lifelong encounter with Jesus
as the baby in her womb,
as a child born into the world,
as a child growing up,
as a young man,
as the Messiah preaching and ministering and praying and healing,
as the Saviour suffering, and dying for us,
as the Risen Jesus.

What begins by welcoming God's Word announced by the angel Gabriel, becomes an incredible encounter with God during her life and into eternity.

The announcement by the angel Gabriel also informs Mary in Luke 1:36-37

"And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing is impossible to God."

Mary sets out on a journey to visit and support Elizabeth. For her, family is important.

May we welcome Jesus deeper into our lives.
May we seek an intimate and loving encounter with Jesus this Christmas.

GOD SURPRISES US AND ASKS US TO BE FAITHFUL. GOD IS OUR STRENGTH.

Pope Francis in his first year as Pope, [spoke of Mary's inspiration on the 13th October 2013.](http://bit.ly/Francis13102013)
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*"...I would like to reflect with you on three things:
first, God surprises us, second, God asks us to be faithful, and third, God is our strength.*

1. First: God surprises us.

God surprises us. It is precisely in poverty, in weakness and in humility that he reveals himself and grants us his love, which saves us, heals us and gives us strength.

He asks us only to obey his word and to trust in him.

This was the experience of the Virgin Mary.

At the message of the angel, she does not hide her surprise.

It is the astonishment of realizing that God,

to become man, had chosen her, a simple maid of Nazareth.

Not someone who lived in a palace amid power and riches,

or one who had done extraordinary things,

but simply someone who was open to God and put her trust in him,

even without understanding everything:

"Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word" (Lk 1:38).

That was her answer.

God constantly surprises us,

he bursts our categories,

he wreaks havoc with our plans.

And he tells us:

Trust me, do not be afraid, let yourself be surprised, leave yourself behind and follow me!

... Do I let myself be surprised by God, as Mary was,

or do I remain caught up in my own safety zone:

in forms of material, intellectual or ideological security,

taking refuge in my own projects and plans?

Do I truly let God into my life? How do I answer him?

*2. ...This is the second thing: to remember Christ always –
to be mindful of Jesus Christ – and thus to persevere in faith.*

God surprises us with his love,

but he demands that we be faithful in following him...

Often it is easy enough to say "yes",

but then we fail to repeat this "yes" each and every day. We fail to be faithful.

Mary said her "yes" to God: a "yes" which threw her simple life in Nazareth into turmoil, and not only once.

Any number of times she had to utter a heartfelt "yes"

at moments of joy and sorrow, culminating in the “yes” she spoke at the foot of the Cross.

... God asks us to be faithful to him, daily, in our everyday life.

He goes on to say that, even if we are sometimes unfaithful to him, he remains faithful.

*In his mercy, he never tires of stretching out his hand to lift us up,
to encourage us to continue our journey,
to come back and tell him of our weakness,
so that he can grant us his strength.*

*This is the real journey: to walk with the Lord always,
even at moments of weakness, even in our sins.*

Never to prefer a makeshift path of our own. That kills us.

Faith is ultimate fidelity, like that of Mary.

3. The last thing: God is our strength.

... Take Mary. After the Annunciation,

her first act is one of charity towards her elderly kinswoman Elizabeth.

Her first words are: “My soul magnifies the Lord”,

*in other words, a song of praise and thanksgiving to God
not only for what he did for her,*

but for what he had done throughout the history of salvation.

Everything is his gift.

*If we can realize that everything is God’s gift,
how happy will our hearts be!*

Everything is his gift. He is our strength!

Saying “thank you” is such an easy thing, and yet so hard!

How often do we say “thank you” to one another in our families?

These are essential words for our life in common. “Sorry”, “excuse me”, “thank you”.

Pope Francis suggested that

*“As we continue our celebration of the Eucharist,
let us invoke Mary’s intercession.*

*May she help us to be open to God’s surprises,
to be faithful to him each and every day,*

and to praise and thank him, for he is our strength. “

May we be inspired by Mary as mother of Jesus.

May we be inspired by the way Mary listens and hears,
clarifies, wonders, welcomes, and responds to Jesus.

Let us pray.

Fr Gerry

Readings: <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/122020.cfm>