

Mary!

Micah 5^{2-5a}; Psalm 80¹⁻⁸; Hebrews 10⁵⁻¹⁰; Luke 1³⁹⁻⁴⁵

Blessed are you among women. [Luke 1⁴²]

We have almost made it through Advent - remember we said that this was the period that the Church uses to remind us of why it was necessary for Jesus to be born.

The book of Hebrews is the stark statement of that - the old system of sacrifices didn't work: God abandons the need for humans to take responsibility for their actions and sends Jesus who is offered **once for all** as the sacrifice for sin.

It isn't Christmas yet - just a little patience!

On this 4th Sunday in Advent the Church thinks about Mary, the mother of Jesus - the one to whom this Church is dedicated.

It seems to have been quite difficult for Christians to get a balanced view on Mary:

- ✦ Protestants, generally, haven't given Mary enough recognition and move too quickly on from her part in nurturing Christ.
- ✦ Roman Catholics, generally, have given Mary too much attention and have given the impression that she is the 'gate-keeper' to Christ.

Neither will do!

What we do know is this:

- ✦ Mary was from Nazareth. According to the custom at the time, she would have known whom she was going to marry from her birth - Joseph's family and her own would have that sorted from the beginning.
- ✦ When the angel Gabriel appeared to her, she was as shocked as anyone else at the possibility of her being pregnant - **how can this be since I am a virgin?** Her family would have ensured that she could never have been alone - she was, after all, adolescent.
- ✦ Luke will go on [3²³⁻³⁸] to make the point that Mary (as well as Joseph) can trace her ancestry to King David!

- ✦ Mary was willing to be used by God - **let it be to me according to your will** [Lk 1³⁸].
- ✦ Mary's cousin Elizabeth and the unborn John the Baptist recognised that what was happening was of God - **blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb.**
- ✦ The miracle of the unseen God of Israel and the idea of God becoming human and confined was offensive in the 1st Century. The Jews had believed that to see God was to die. Yet Mary becomes the incubator for God - and lives, which is why by the 4th century she is described by the Church Councils as *theotokos*, the God-bearer, which is why she is referred to in our Eucharist Prayer as *the Mother of God*.

The Lectionary makes the point that there is no accident in all this - it is no accident that Joseph goes to Bethlehem to his family home for the baby to be born and that in the birth of Mary's child all that God promised is fulfilled!

Mary's role goes on through the years - she is the constant in Jesus' life, even though she clearly goes on to have children with Joseph who are recognised as Jesus' brothers and sisters.

She is there at his Barmitvah; at the miracle at the wedding at Cana in Galilee; she is there in the background throughout Jesus ministry; she is there at the cross; and there at the resurrection.

What Mary shows us is that all that God needs for an individual to change the world is their willingness to be used by God - an unconditional 'yes' to God whatever is asked and whatever anyone else may think about it!

What will it take for you and for me to say 'yes' to God? You probably don't want Gabriel appearing and telling you that you are pregnant! But it seems to me that pregnancy may be preferable to the simple things that God wants us to say yes to (to live like Christians; to pray; to share our faith)!