

She was just a young woman, but she belonged to God and nothing nor anyone could separate her from him.

St Teresa of Calcutta, 1910–1997

#### 4

Him whom the heavens cannot contain, the womb of one woman bore. She ruled our Ruler; she carried Him in whom we are; she gave milk to our Bread.

St Augustine of Hippo, 354–430

### Related topics

*For further study:*

Jesus Christ, Son of God; Jesus Christ, fulfilment of the Hebrew scriptures; Mary, model of the church; faith; eschatology; reign of God; discipleship; repentance and reconciliation; Christ's coming: past, present and future; parousia

### Closing Prayer

Eternal God,  
as Mary waited for the birth of your Son,  
so we wait for his coming in glory;  
bring us through the birth pangs of this present age  
to see, with her, our great salvation  
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Common Worship · Additional Collects · Advent 4

## The Fourth Sunday of Advent

*(Sunday between 18 and 24 December inclusive)*

### Principal Service readings

2 Samuel 7.1-11, 16

Nathan's prophecy to David: his dynasty will last for ever

*Canticle: Magnificat or Psalm 89.1-4, 19-26 or 89.1-8*

Romans 16.25-27

Hymn of praise to God

Luke 1.26-38

The Annunciation to Mary

### Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,  
speak to our hearts in the stillness,  
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,  
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;  
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

### Gospel Reading

#### *The Annunciation to Mary*

<sup>26</sup>In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, <sup>27</sup>to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup>And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.' <sup>29</sup>But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup>The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. <sup>31</sup>And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. <sup>32</sup>He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. <sup>33</sup>He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' <sup>34</sup>Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' <sup>35</sup>The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. <sup>36</sup>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. <sup>37</sup>For nothing will be impossible with God.' <sup>38</sup>Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her.

## Comments and Questions

Today's gospel story brings us closer to the Christmas mystery. A messenger from God is sent to Nazareth, an angel, which means 'messenger'. We can see that this scene matches the one about John's birth (1.5.25). It is also informed by one in Judges 13.2-7, in which an angel visits Manoah's wife and informs her that she will have a special child, Samson. The miraculous birth, in one case age and infertility, in the other virginity, legitimates the prophecy.

Differences with the story of John are instructive. John will be great before the Lord (1.15), but Jesus will be great and Son of the Most High (1.32). John will prepare a people (1.17), but Jesus will rule the people (12.33). John's role is temporary (1.17), but Jesus' kingdom will never end (1.33). John is to be a prophet (1.15), but Jesus is more than just a prophet: he is Son of God (1.35). John will be 'filled with the Holy Spirit' as a prophet (1.15), but the overshadowing of the Spirit and Power will make Jesus 'the Holy One'. The full meaning of these statements will become clear during the course of Luke's narrative, but from the start the reader is given to understand that Jesus is more than a kingly successor to David.

Another deliberate contrast is that between Zechariah and Mary. Luke's focus on Mary is in any case remarkable. There was a patriarchal biblical tradition and social context. Matthew, in his narrative focuses on Joseph, but Luke focuses on Mary. Zechariah holds an official position among the people, Mary holds no official position. Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, are described as 'righteous' and 'blameless' (1.6). Mary is not described as righteous – she has nothing to show for her faith. Zechariah's revelation occurs in a cultic setting, when he is doing something important in the temple. The revelation to Mary occurs in a domestic setting, to one who has no power or status in society, in a world ruled by men. Further than that, she has neither husband nor child to validate her existence. Finding she has 'found favour with God'

(1.31), shows that God is looking under the surface of things to carry out his plan.

Zechariah's response to the angel is, 'How will I know this?' (1.18), a demand for proof. Mary's response is more positive. She queries how things can happen as the angel says, in the light of her virginity (1.34). When the angel makes clear it will all happen by divine command not human actions, she responds with obedient faith, 'Let it happen to me as you say' (1.38).

## Quotations

### 1

How often in these situations must Mary have returned inwardly to the hour when God's angel had spoken to her, pondering afresh the greeting: 'Rejoice, full of grace!' and the consoling words: 'Do not be afraid!' The angel departs; her mission remains, and with it matures her inner closeness to God, a closeness that in her heart she is able to see and touch.

Pope Benedict XVI, 1927–

### 2

The whole ecclesial movement of women can and should reflect the light of Gospel revelation, according to which a woman, as the representative of the human race, was called to give her consent to the Incarnation of the Word. It is the account of the Annunciation that suggests this truth when it tells that only after the "fiat" of Mary, who consented to be the Mother of the Messiah, did 'the angel depart from her' (Lk. 1:38). The angel had completed his mission: he could bring to God humanity's "yes", spoken by Mary of Nazareth.

Pope St. John Paul II, 1920–2005

### 3

Mary showed complete trust in God by agreeing to be used as an instrument in his plan of salvation. She trusted him in spite of her nothingness because she knew he who is mighty could do great things in her and through her. Once she said "yes" to him, she never doubted.

<sup>1</sup> *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.