

GOSPEL

Luke 1:26-38

The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, so highly favoured! The Lord is with you.' She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, 'Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favour. Listen! You are to conceive and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob for ever and his reign will have no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'But how can this come about, since I am a virgin?' 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you' the angel answered 'and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God. Know this too: your kinswoman Elizabeth has, in her old age, herself conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God.' 'I am the handmaid of the Lord,' said Mary 'let what you have said be done to me.' And the angel left her.

REFLECTION BY ST JOHN PAUL II

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A few days before Christmas, the liturgy presents us with the well-known and suggestive dialogue of the Annunciation, in which the angel Gabriel reveals to Mary the mystery of the Incarnation: "You will conceive in your womb and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus" (Lk 1:31).

In the womb of the Virgin, the Son of God became man. From the first instant of his conception, the eternal self of the Word, in eternal dialogue with the Father within the ineffable Trinitarian communion, made his own the human nature that sprang forth in the immaculate body of his Mother. This profound unity of humanity and divinity in the person of the Word allows the Church to attribute to Mary the title of "Theotokos": Mother of God. Mary is truly, as the angel calls her, "full of grace."

2. The conception of the Son of God in her womb is certainly a unique and unrepeatable event. But, indirectly, it also sheds light on the dignity of man, of every human being from the moment of conception in the mother's womb.

Now that we are preparing to celebrate the Year of the Family, which will begin next Sunday ... the Feast of the Holy Family, I am pleased to pause and reflect on the grandeur of this mystery. The conception of a human being is not merely a biological event; it is the moment when a human being begins to exist. Indeed, science demonstrates that in the fruit of conception, "the program of what this living being will be is fixed: a human being, an individual with his characteristic features already well determined" (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration on Provoked Abortion, no. 13, cf. *L'Osservatore Romano*, Spanish edition, December 1, 1974, p. 10). From that embryonic existence to full physical and spiritual maturity, a continuous and organic development takes place. This evident projection of the embryo toward its future prevents it from being treated as mere biological matter, since, in the divine plan for humanity, the precise biological "individuality" received in the mother's womb is also received by the omnipotent love of God, who intervenes to endow it with an immortal soul. This soul, in fact, as the principle of the person, is created immediately by God (cf. Pius XII, *Humani generis*; *Dz-Sch.*, 3.896). It follows, then, that the human being, even the most fragile, protected both by the warmth of the mother's womb and by God's creative love, must be accorded the respect due to every human person.

3. Most Holy Virgin, you lived the sublime mystery of motherhood better than any other woman. As faith impelled you to embrace the Word of the Lord, your body became a fertile space for his incarnation.

Help us, Mother, to perceive ever more deeply the dignity of every human being. Grant that men and women called to the sublime vocation of fatherhood and motherhood may be clearly aware of this dignity, so that they may always be "sanctuaries of life" through the wonder of procreation, entrusted by God to the authenticity of their faithful love and their watchful responsibility.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



Head: Mary trusted God's plan even when she did not fully understand it. What does her response teach us about faith and trust?



Heart: Mary's "yes" changed the course of her life. Is there an area of your life where you sense God inviting you to trust him more deeply, but find yourself hesitant or afraid?



Hands: What is one concrete way you can say "yes" to God this week? How might that help you grow in trust and openness to his plans?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another:

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (for example, "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Offer prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps praying the 'Glory Be'.