

Gathering Music

"Christmas Eve 1913" Bridges/Holdridge, and
 "Stille Nacht" (arr. Chip Davies)
 offered by the Honeychuck Family and Jonathan Stein

Words of Welcome

Rev. Gabi

Ave Maria

Franz Schubert

Sofia Kull

Homily --- Maryam

The Virgin

Ave Maria, Gratia plena, Dominus tecum, Benedicta tu in mulieribus, Et benedictus fructus ventris tuae, Jesus.

This is how **we** first hear about her. Her Hebrew name is Maryam, today, she is called **Mary**, Saint Mary, the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, the Second Eve, the Queen of Heaven – **and**, she is without a doubt one of the most **famous** women in the world.

Greetings to you, Mary, full of grace, you are blessed among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus.

According to the gospel of Luke, chapter 1, verses 26 through 38, she was a young woman (yes, I know she was only 13 years old, but 2000 years ago, a 13-year old was a young **adult**, a full member of the clan, working full-time alongside her mother, her aunts and female cousins; ready to be married and have children of her own.)

So, this young woman has a **surprise visit** by this tall, good-looking dude (he always looks really handsome in the paintings . . .), and he tells her that she is going to have **God's baby!** Can you imagine that?

Let's listen to the story as the apostle Luke tells it; in a contemporary translation: (Tess Snyder)

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to the Galilean village of Nazareth to a virgin engaged to be married to a man descended from David. His name was Joseph, and the virgin's name was Mary. Upon entering, Gabriel greeted her:

Good morning!
 You're beautiful with God's beauty,
 Beautiful inside and out!
 God be with you.

She was thoroughly shaken, wondering what was behind a greeting like that. But the angel assured her, "Mary, you have nothing to fear. God has a surprise for you: You will become pregnant and give birth to a son and call his name Jesus.

He will be great,
 be called 'Son of the Highest.'
 The Lord God will give him

the throne of his father David;
 He will rule Jacob's house forever—
 no end, ever, to his kingdom." Mary said to the angel, "But how? I've never slept with a man." The angel answered,
 The Holy Spirit will come upon you,
 the power of the Highest hover over you;
 Therefore, the child you bring to birth
 will be called Holy, Son of God.

And did you know that your cousin Elizabeth conceived a son, old as she is? Everyone called her barren, and here she is six months pregnant! Nothing, you see, is impossible with God."

And Mary said,
 Yes, I see it all now:
 I'm the Lord's maid, ready to serve.
 Let it be with me
 just as you say.

Then the angel left her.

What a remarkable young woman Maryam was!

No screaming in fear,

or running away from the job,

no ridiculing of the messenger,

just a little surprise, a few questions, and then ---faithful **acquiescence**.

Hymn #241

"In the Bleak Midwinter"

Poem – Joseph's Monologue, by Jim Burklo

George Haldeman

"'God did it' isn't an explanation," said Joseph.
 He got no account for the baby's chromosomes,
 No description of the mechanism that
 Transmuted the divine shadow into royal blood.
 "'The devil made me do it' would have sounded better to me," said Joseph,
 Though it never did him any good when he said it to his old girlfriends.
 It was a mystery to him,
 What moved him to listen for the rhyme
 And puzzle for the reason
 That Mary gave him the news in the manner that she did:
 A mystery that put him at peace.
 There was something in the way she held his hand
 That no medical journal article could correlate;
 Something in the way she gazed into his eyes
 That eluded the grasp of genomic research.
 "I don't ask you to believe what I am saying," she said,
 "I don't ask you to take my word for it."

I just ask you to love, as if.
 Love me as if I were yours,
 Love this baby as if he were yours,
 As I love you as if you were mine."

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Choir: Mary, did you Know?

The Mother of God -- A Jewish Mother

Well, the angel was right, of course, Mary got pregnant and had a baby boy, and they named him **Jesus**.

We **don't** know details about the birth, but it can't have been **easy**!

First she had to **ride** - on a donkey! - from Nazareth to Jerusalem, when the baby was due any moment ...

Then there was **no room** available in any of the inns; and she ended up bedding down in a stable with cattle.

(But we know she had some impressive visitors in her humble abode: **Three kings!**)

From the moment of J.C.'s birth, Maryam fades out of the picture.

The next time Mary is mentioned is when she presents her son in the temple, a ritual prescribed for all first-born Jewish boys.

After that, the focus completely shifts to her son, Jesus.

Mary is not mentioned much anymore in the Bible.

However, being mother to that particular child is challenging: the family has to flee to Egypt because the ruling **King Herod** is afraid of this other "King" who has been **prophesized** in the Jewish scripture.

Because of that prophesy, he has all male newborns in his kingdom killed. Joseph, Mary and their son have to stay away for two years, until the Herod dies.

Let us leave Maryam for a few minutes, and listen to the joy every mother feels when the pregnancy is finally over...

Hallelujah Chorus

The New Eve

In the following years, Mary goes through many of the same problems every mother experiences.

Just one example: Luke tells us in chapter 2, verses 41-52, that the 12-year old Jesus is **separated** from his parents --- because he is sidetracked by an interesting theological discussion with the high priests; and when his mother rebukes him, he **mouthes** off to her - in typical teenage fashion.

Mary does not see much of her son, because as soon as he is old enough, he starts traveling all over Galilee. She was present, however, when Jesus worked his first public miracle!

The whole family, and the apostles, attended a wedding in Canaan; and the hosts of the wedding party were running out of wine.

Mary encouraged her son to "do something about it" and – reluctantly - he turned jugs of water into wine. She must have been proud of him!

But I'm sure she also worried about this strange **power** her son had; and eventually about the reactions from the Romans against this Jewish revolutionary.

Even if you've never read the New Testament, I'm sure you have seen paintings or statues of the "**Pieta**,"

I don't have to tell you the rest of the story, you know that Maryam **was there** in the last dreadful hours of her son's life; she was there when they took him off the cross and laid him in her lap.

What pain for any mother to hold the body of her dead child!

I often wonder how her faith held up during those 30 plus years, and in those last hours.

Maryam is also sometimes referred to as the New Eve, because of her obedience to God's command (contrasted with Eve's disobedience).

According to that theology, Mary's obedience led to the salvation of mankind through Jesus.

What an interesting thought! It feeds into the belief that God is **not** omnipotent, actually, God has to try several times to get it **right** . . . but also, that God gives us a second chance, a second shot at salvation.

Maybe we can take this as a hint for our relationships: **nobody's** perfect; and -- let's give each other a second chance?

Another message for us, today: Don't run away from unpleasant conflicts or problems, the outcome might **surprise you!**

Hymn #246 O Little Town of Bethlehem

The Queen of Heaven

Mary never ages in the New Testament. After her son's death, she seems to disappear, just like Joseph before her.

In the book of *Acts*, she is briefly mentioned as one of the women who went with the apostles, back to the room where the **Last Supper** had been celebrated.

And most likely she stayed with this group of women who had dedicated their lives to helping Jesus, and who were now starting small **house churches** everywhere.

According to Chapter 12 in the Book of Revelation, Mary ascended to heaven after her death. This “assumption” is a major holiday for Roman Catholics, Greek and eastern Orthodox Christians, as well as some Anglicans.

In the year 431, at the Council of Ephesus, Maryam was declared “**Theodokus**” literally translated: “the bearer of God.”

In other words, from then on she was officially called the Mother of God. Throughout the seventeen centuries since this declaration, theologians as well as believers have **debated** this status and title; just like they have debated her **virginity**.

But what **really** matters is not any official statement by a body of learned men.

What matters is that Mary is **the one** to whom women all over the world pray when they are in need. They pray to Mary when they can't get pregnant, and they pray to her when they have problems with their kids or husbands.

Mary is the one they look up to when they need extra **courage, stamina, tolerance**.

Mary is maiden, mother and crone, she is empathy and wisdom.

Mary is the feminine aspect of **God**.

Mary gave birth to a baby god who was to become the hope of his parents, the hope of his community, the hope of the world. And - one of the greatest teachers the world has known!

As Jesus was, we, each and everyone of us, are now the hope of our own parents, the hope of our own community, the hope of our own **world**!

Forming the Circle

Hymn #251 Silent Night

Christmas Prayer

by Maureen Killoran

Not gold, nor myrrh, nor even frankincense
would I have for you this season,
but simple gifts, the ones that are hardest to find,
the ones that are perfect,
even for those who have everything (if such there be).

I would (if I could)
have for you the gift of courage,
the strength to face the gauntlets
only you can name,

and the firmness in your heart to know
that you (**yes, you!**) can be a bearer of the quiet dignity
that is the human glorified.

I would (if by my intention I could make it happen)
have for you the gift of connection,
the sense of standing on the hinge of time,
touching past and future
standing with certainty that you (**yes, you!**)
are the point where it all comes together.

I would (if wishing could make it so)
have for you the gift of community,
a nucleus of love and challenge,
to convince you in your soul
that you (yes, you!) are a source of light
in a world too long believing in the dark.

Not gold, nor myrrh, nor even frankincense,
would I have for you this season,
but simple gifts, the ones that are hardest to find,
the ones that are perfect,
even for those who have everything (if such there be).