

Fourth Sunday of Advent – B
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Holy Family Catholic Church
Kirkland, Washington
24 December 2017

2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16
Psalm 89
Romans 16:25-27
(Luke 1:38) Luke 1:26-38

The Angelus – Recognize the Lord

The words that I prayed in the *Collect* (the *Opening Prayer*) may have sounded familiar to you:

*Pour forth we beseech you, O Lord,
your grace into our hearts,
that we, to whom the Incarnation of Christ your Son
was made known by the message of an Angel,
may by his Passion and Cross
be brought to the glory of his Resurrection.ⁱ*

These are the same words prayed at the conclusion of *The Angelus*, the short devotional prayed three times a day – morning, noon, and night – by people all around the world. Christians have prayed *The Angelus* since at least the 12th century in honor of the Annunciation, the event we heard proclaimed in this morning’s Gospel.ⁱⁱ

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The Annunciation is the greatest event in human history; the day that marked the beginning of our salvation; the day that God was incarnate and became human.ⁱⁱⁱ *The Angelus* is prayed in three parts that recall the main aspects of this most important event:^{iv}

- 1) The Angel Gabriel was sent from God to a virgin named Mary.^v
- 2) Mary said, “May it be done to me according to your word.”^{vi}
- 3) And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.^{vii}

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Every Sunday at Noon, thousands of people gather in St. Peter’s Square in Vatican City to pray *The Angelus* with the Pope.^{viii} Three years ago, at *The Angelus* on this Fourth Sunday of Advent, Pope Francis preached to the audience that the reading of the Annunciation in today’s

Gospel is meant to show us how to prepare for Christmas, which is now upon us.^{ix} That, in the Annunciation, we see two aspects of Mary's attitude that model for us how to prepare for Jesus' coming into our world and into our hearts at Christmas: her *faith* and that she *recognized* the Lord.

First, Mary models *faith* for all of us as Christian disciples. In the Annunciation, Mary heard the Word of God and responded with faith; she entrusted herself totally to His love and mercy. Because she had spent time listening to the Word of God and developing a relationship with the Lord, she could give her *fiat* – she could say “May it be done to me...”^x She could give her *fiat* without knowing all the details of the way the Lord was leading her.^{xi}

This is the model for us. When we hear the Lord calling us – when the Lord is coming into our world and into our hearts – we, too, can respond in faith without knowing the details of the road ahead. We can respond in faith because we know the Lord is with us; that He is worthy of our trust;^{xiii} and that, no matter which way He calls us, the ultimate destination He is leading us to is to be with Him in Heaven.^{xiii}

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Second is that Mary *recognized* the Lord. We might have faith in God to lead us – but if we don't recognize the Lord, then how will we know to follow Him? Pope Francis preached the following:

How many times Jesus comes into our lives, and how many times he sends us an angel, and how many times we don't notice because we are so taken, immersed in our own thoughts, in our own affairs and even, in these days, in our Christmas preparations, so as not to notice Him who comes and knocks at the door of our hearts...asking for a 'yes' like Mary's.^{xiv}

Yes, Mary had *faith*, but when the Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, she *recognized* him as sent from God.^{xv} Do we take that for granted? Maybe we presume that we would obviously recognize an angel if one were to appear to us. I mean, how hard could it be? Wings, halo,

white robe, bright lights... But can we be so sure of that? If we don't spend time listening to God's Word; if we don't spend time in our own personal prayer with God; if we don't have a relationship with God and His angels and saints – what makes us think that we would recognize an angel sent to us from God? What makes us think – as Pope Francis reflected – that we haven't missed many times that God has already sent an angel to us, but we were too busy to notice?

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Pope Francis's point is not for us to regret the times we've missed God. Rather, his point is for us to start now, on this day before Jesus comes to us at Christmas. If we feel regret for the times we've let the Lord pass us by – that is not a sign that it's too late – that is the Lord knocking on our heart right now, asking us to say 'yes' to Him today. If we feel a desire to grow closer to the Lord; to become a better person; to be reconciled to God or to a family member, friend, or neighbor – that is the Lord knocking on our heart, asking us to say 'yes' to Him today. If you feel this way, respond with time in prayer; respond by receiving Him in the Eucharist; respond by making a good Confession. Recognize the Lord and don't let Him pass by!

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Throughout Advent, our themes have been: *Be watchful! Be alert!*^{xvi} – and – *Prepare the way of the Lord!*^{xvii} Today, through Mary's example in the Annunciation, we learn that being *watchful*, *alert*, and *prepared* mean nothing if we don't know Whom we are *waiting* for, *looking* for, and *preparing* for. We have to know the One Whom we are *waiting* for, *looking* for, and *preparing* for. A saint used to say: "I am afraid that the Lord will come." He was not afraid of the Lord. Rather, he was afraid that he would not *recognize* the Lord, and that he would let the Lord pass by.^{xviii}

My friends, there is nothing to fear!^{ix} The Lord is knocking on the door of all of our hearts.^{xx} Tonight He comes as a baby born to a Virgin and laid in a manger.^{xxi} Today He has come to us in His Word and will come to us in the Eucharist to strengthen us.^{xxii} One day soon He will come in glory with salvation for us and all His people.^{xxiii} Let's take the time to recognize Him now; to receive Him in our bodies and in our hearts now; so that we will no longer let Him pass by!

ⁱ *Collect for Fourth Sunday of Advent in Roman Missal, Third Edition*

ⁱⁱ Luke 1:26-38

Herbert Thurston, "Angelus" in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (1907)

ⁱⁱⁱ Dom Gaspar Lefebvre, OSB, "March 25: The Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary" in *St. Andrew Daily Missal* (1953), 678: "Today's feast recalls the greatest event in history, the Incarnation of our Lord in the womb of a Virgin."

Also see *Nicene Creed*: "For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man."

^{iv} *The Angelus*

V. The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary.

R. And she conceived by the Holy Spirit.

V. Behold the Handmaid of the Lord.

R. Be it done unto me according to thy word.

V. And the Word was made flesh.

R. And dwelt among us.

^v Luke 1:26-27

^{vi} Luke 1:38

^{vii} John 1:14

^{viii} Philip Kosloski, "Pope Quiz: Which Holy Father Started the Sunday Angelus?" in *Aleteia* 30 July 2017:

First *Angelus* Address given by Pope John XXIII on Ash Wednesday, 11 February 1959

Sunday *Angelus* Address tradition began in the years following by Pope Paul VI

^{ix} Pope Francis, *Angelus*, 21 December 2014, Saint Peter's Square, Vatican City

^x Luke 1:38: "*fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum.*" Latin for "May it be done to me according to your word."

^{xi} See Luke 1:34: Mary asked, "How can this be...?" – or – more literally, "How *will* this be...?" Mary had faith and asked the angel how it would be.

^{xii} 1 Thessalonians 5:24: "The one who calls you is faithful, and he will also accomplish it."

^{xiii} *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 229, 1023-1029, 1724, 1727

^{xiv} Pope Francis, *ibid.*

^{xv} Luke 1:26: "...the angel Gabriel was sent from God..."

^{xvi} First Sunday of Advent: Mark 13:33

^{xvii} Second and Third Sundays of Advent: Isaiah 40:3; Mark 1:3; John 1:23

^{xviii} Pope Francis, *Angelus*

^{xix} Luke 1:30: "Then the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary...'"

^{xx} Revelation 3:20: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock."

^{xxi} Luke 2:7: "She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger..."

^{xxii} *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 7

^{xxiii} *Penitential Act in Roman Missal*: "Lord Jesus, you will come in glory with salvation for your people."