

## Sermon: 2020/12/20 (4th Sunday in Advent, Year B) - 2 *Samuel 7:1-11,16; (Canticle 3); Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38\_BTR*

[Invite children to light the candles on the Advent wreath. Have a deck-chair available and a large Bible.]

### Kids' Talk: Don't Assume

[Erect and sit down in the deck-chair looking relieved.]

*Phew!*

King David was exhausted.

He had finally captured Jerusalem from the Jebusites and made it his capital-city.

He had been fighting for many long, hard years; but now he could relax.

And do other things.

Like building a handsome palace to live in!

That's what every king needs, right?

So that's what he did.

And as he sat there (in his throne), enjoying his new home, he had a thought:

"I know," he said to himself, "I'm going to build a new home for God too!

I'm going to build Him a temple!"

But, we heard, in our Old Testament reading just now, the prophet Samuel came to David, and was like:

"Whoa, whoa.

Hold on.

Why do you think God wants that?

Did you ask Him?!"

You see, *David* needed a palace. - somewhere to keep him warm in winter and dry from the rain.

Somewhere to run the kingdom of Israel from.

But God doesn't.

*God* doesn't need a place to live.

He's everywhere!

Around us and above us.

But, like David, it is very easy to think that God wants what we want.

It is very easy to think that God *thinks* like us.

Likes what we like.

*Dis-likes* what we dislike.

And today Samuel reminds David - reminds us - that we must be careful not to make *assumptions*.

Much better, [[pick up large Bible](#)] is to check in the Bible and see what God *really* thinks - its all in there don't you know?

Let's pray:

Lord God, ..., in Jesus' name, amen.

## Mary Needed Elizabeth, and We Need the Church

Why go to Church?

This is a perennial question.

Every generation; every *person* surely asks themselves this at some point.

And at a time of pandemic; at a time when we're under pressure to - as the manta goes: "do your part, stay apart" - it has never been more pertinent; the answer more *pressing*.

Why not - if you're in good health - just put regular worship "on the back-burner"?

Give it up altogether and come back to it sometime in 2021.

This is a matter I want us to begin to explore this morning.

Not in depth, mind; but the allocated Scriptures do bear on the question.

Firstly, though, let's tackle that other "elephant in the room" - *Mary*.

The blessed virgin.

In some traditions - or, "*streams*" - of Christianity, Mary, the mother of Christ, is almost a supernatural figure herself;

a semi-divine, otherworldly creature of unapproachable holiness.

A figure (said to be) *sooo(!)* saintly that she ceases to be someone to whom we might relate, to whom we might actually look for inspiration as to how one should respond and follow Jesus.

Now, some of the dogma about her - and if I was feeling uncharitable I might say, "mythology" - *is* (very) venerable.

Indeed, *sooo(!)* venerable" that it does give pause for thought even to a committed Evangelical like me:

I'm referring, of course, to the suggestion emanating from some particular quarters of her "immaculate conception," her "perpetual virginity," and her "assumption;" *all* ideas which lack evidence.

Specifically, in particular, these are "ideas" - *dogma* - that receive no kind of support from the Scriptures themselves.

Indeed, at least *one* of these notions not only finds no "support," it is *contradicted* by the Apostolic witness.

But Mary *was* a *remarkable* young woman.

An adolescent, really.

And a *deeply* pious, religious one at that:

God chose to incarnate Himself within a person who He foreknew would be a willing, enthusiastic participant.

No, more than that - who He foreknew would be (herself) a *contributor* to His plan of salvation.

Which is to say, He chose Mary *not* just to carry Him in her womb - *not* just to be a *vehicle*.

A vessel.

*Transport*.

(From Heaven to this earthly plane.)

Rather, He certainly chose Mary because He foreknew that she would carefully and precisely raise Him - her son - in the ways of righteousness - that is to say, according to those *ancient* laws - the Levitical "laws" - handed to Moses on Sinai and in the Wilderness.

But Mary wasn't the only faithful Jewish person in Palestine in the First Century, through Israel was admittedly very much in crisis; in deep disarray.

Joseph, her betrothed, was surely her match in this respect - in possessing a high regard for the sacred customs and beliefs of his people.

And both their families were similar people too in the same regard:

don't forget Elizabeth, for example, mentioned in the reading.

And the strangers Simeon and Anna who worshipped the baby Jesus when he was brought to the Temple for circumcision.

And many, many others too - anonymous men and women: like the "Essenes," who lived simple, rustic, agrarian lives in the caves of Qumran by the shores of the "Dead Sea."

But what, perhaps, elevated Mary "above the herd," as it is said - what singled her out from "the crowd," I guess, was how *quick* she was to put her *faith* in God:

Look again at the insert if you need to - at the last page; at the final sentence.

(Verse 38.)

Gabriel - the angel - a frightening apparition, which suddenly invaded her personal space - shares only a few sentences - mostly greetings and some words of reassurance that she wasn't to run off screaming and such like, and almost immediately Mary agreed:

"Yup, okay, let's do this" is basically her response to news that would not only change her life irrevocably but the everyone's everywhere too.

*This* is what we should love about Mary.

*This* is what should fascinate us about her.

Her "light-speed" *readiness* to trust the Creator.

But before I stick Mary back up on a (high) pedestal for us to admire as some rare, exotic creature far removed in character and virtue from ourselves, just pause with me a moment and consider this -

Consider the the bigger story; the *fuller* "story" about her response to Gabriel's shocking news of the miracle of the Messiah.

Which I'm sure you remember -

once Gabriel departed, Mary rushed over to her cousin's house (down in Judea), having been told that she *also* was pregnant by the assistance of the Holy Spirit.

And, Luke tells us, Mary spent 'three months' living with her: [1:56].

Three months!

That's not a casual, typical visit.

Imagine having your relatives come to stay, unannounced, for that length of time. You know, it makes me think of 'National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation', when the protagonist, "Clark Griswold," comes outside just in time to see *his* broke cousin, "Eddie," played by the actor Randy Quaid, driving up into what is a rather smart, up-scale subdivision, in a battered, rusty, *awful*-looking "RV." With the kids "Rocky" and "Ruby Sue" "in toe," and an undisciplined, misbehaving Rottweiler. Such a visit is disruptive; it's inconvenient.

It's...odd.

Out-of-the-ordinary.

And I think this is significant - those "odd" "out-of-the-ordinary" 'three months' together: Mary with Elizabeth.

In fact, I speculate to you that the point of that time together was very significant to those women.

It was about strategising.

Finding solidarity.

Caring for another.

Mutual support.

Encouraging each other.

Preparing each other for the enormous and daunting task ahead...

Their time together, in other words, was *Church*.

"Church" before there was a church.

Mary and Elizabeth model for us how God's people are supposed to come together to *resource* themselves for being disciples in the world.

They model for us that Church is what we do *when* we've accepted and embraced the awesome reality that is a living, active, interested God.

They model for us that gathering together is what we do when we've said yes to the Lord as they had.

You see, you're *exactly* like Mary:

that you're sitting here in Church (today - or watching online at home) implies you

have said in your own way "Here I am, the servant of the Lord."([Lk. 1:38]) as she said.

So take the next step that she took - run and collect yourselves in those places - *this* place - as she did with Elizabeth.

Because saying "yes" to Jesus is only the beginning, and even Mary saw that what was to follow needed others who had also done similar.

Even Mary - *Mary(!)* - understood that one can't be a Christian by oneself.

It is always a group effort; a *team* effort where we surround ourselves with others on the same journey.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, amen.