

Homily for the Annunciation

April 9, 2018

Intro: The name of this feast stresses the birth of our Lord (a great mystery), but this year I want to concentrate on a simpler theme---the human response of the young virgin Mary.

Mary: First of all that the titles Gabriel gives her child do not speak of his divinity. *Jesus* is a common name, *Son of the Most High* is a title of the king throughout the ancient near east, and *throne of David* clearly speaks of the long-anticipated messianic king of Israel. An *eternal reign* only echoes the promise given to David himself. Even the title *Son of God*, which for Luke probably had a divine resonance, had for Mary only this messianic meaning. So Mary's "yes" is what any young woman would affirm with joy---she will be the mother of the glorious reigning messiah for whom Israel had longed for a millennium.

But her eager anticipation turned out quite other than she expected. Her yes almost cost her her marriage to Joseph, the birth of her son did not occur where she had family and home, but on the road and in a stable. The messiah child was a refugee in Egypt, and when he returned to Nazareth, he was nothing more than a common laborer for 25 years. How is this man to become the messiah when his life is half over in obscurity?

Finally, when, under the impulse of the Spirit given in his baptism, he embarks on his mission, her hopes are realized in the power of his teaching and miracles. He is acclaimed by the crowd as the messiah when he enters Jerusalem, but then these hopes are dashed when his royal crown becomes the crown of thorns, and his throne is the cross. And finally, beyond all hope, his resurrection makes him the divine messiah with an eternal reign as the savior of the world.

And through with all these ups and downs and dashed hopes, Mary believed the word of God given by Gabriel. Every meal she cooked, every bucket of water she drew, every prayer she made, was the beginning of a messianic career she could not understand but believed. God was with her in all she did and in this child.

The Meaning for us is simply this: whatever our expectations of the way we will live our lives as a path to God will turn out other than we expect. We study to be an accountant and turn out to be a real estate broker. We marry the man of our dreams and find out he is quite other than we thought. Our perfect child turns out to have a genetic defect, or loses his faith, or becomes an addict and a lost person.

The Church we thought to be unchangeably perfect needs to adapt to new historical circumstances, as it has always done in the past.

And yet in all of our ups and downs, God is present to us. In our baptism he promised us a fruitful life, but not one without our own crosses. If we are members of the Body of Christ we will have not only his messianic role, but also his rejections and difficulties.

Today we learn from Mary that God is faithful, and will bring us home if we but believe. That is good news for everyone in every generation.