

The Blessed Virgin Mary

20 12 15

God our Redeemer,
who prepared the Blessed Virgin Mary
to be the mother of your Son:
grant that, as she looked for his coming as of our saviour,
so we may be ready to greet him
when he comes again as judge.

Our text may be found in today's gospel from Luke chapter 1 and verse 42 – words of Elizabeth, greeting her cousin Mary who has come to visit her:

'Blessed are you among women.'

The fourth Sunday of Advent, sandwiched between our Carol Service yesterday and our Crib Service on Christmas Eve, focuses, appropriately enough, on Mary, the mother of our Lord. So as we prepare once again for Christmas and cribs are in evidence all over the place here in France, I'd like to consider briefly the truth of Elizabeth's greeting to her young cousin.

Elizabeth herself has been touched by the hand of God. An old woman, who has not been previously gifted with a child, Elizabeth is six months pregnant. And the child who will be John the Baptist stirs in her womb at the sound of Mary's voice and kicks his mum. In Elizabeth's eyes, Mary is blessed: blessed because she believed what the angel told her and because the fruit of her womb is blessed.

So in what sense is Mary blessed? First and foremost because she is the mother of God – Theotokos – the God bearer. The Angel Gabriel appears to her and calls her favoured. The Greek word used $\chi\alpha\rho\iota\sigma$ (charis) also means grace. It seems that Mary, like her boy-to-be, has been touched by the grace of God and though she is still a virgin, she will be overshadowed by the Holy Spirit and will conceive a child who will be Jesus, the Son of God, our Lord and Saviour.

Virgin, then, is one special claim about her. A second is that from birth, Mary herself is immaculate, without sin. That Jesus himself is immaculate is an article of our faith – one of the attributes of God. That Mary should be immaculate too is a late doctrine of the Catholic Church formally declared in the latter half of the 19th century. For most Anglicans and for Protestants in general, Mary is not considered immaculate but, for me, I can see that the presence of the Christ child in her womb would render Mary pure in a way that no other human being could have experienced.

A third thing that makes Mary special is her faith in God, her trust in God, her ability to say yes to God. The Angel Gabriel sets out what can happen to her and Mary agrees to be **the handmaid of the Lord**. It is her ability to say yes to the will of God that makes Mary an example to all of us as Christians.

Thereafter, we have moments in the Bible where Mary is part of the unfolding story: not least the nativity narratives in Matthew and Luke but also at the wedding at Cana in Galilee; at the foot of the cross where she is entrusted to the care of the beloved disciple; and there, where she cradles her dead son in her

arms. And finally when the Holy Spirit comes on the Day of Pentecost, Mary is there with the Twelve praying in the Upper Room.

So Mary is clearly blessed and is an example to ourselves of service. But my last question is should we pray to God through her ? On the afternoon of Friday 20th November, I'm on the Corsaire de Saint Malo going out to the rocks of la Pierre de Portes where we are going to throw a wreath into the sea to commemorate the 110th anniversary of the shipwreck of the SS Hilda. As a priest, I have been asked to say La Prière du Marin. I pray in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to the Virgin Mary, queen of the waves. One phrase touches me deeply

*Mais surtout, O Notre Dame,
ne les laisse pas seul à la barre.*

I guess whether you find it appropriate to direct some of your prayers to Mary or to any another saint will depend on your tradition but for me, on that boat tossed by the waves, it seem the right thing to do.

So we can see that Mary is truly 'blessed' ? And, as such, we as Christians ought to respect her as an example of faith, a source of encouragement and even, possibly, as someone to speak to in prayer.

I have spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

*Preached at the Eucharist
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