Fourth Sunday of Advent (B)

Gospel text (*Lk* 1:26-38): The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, "Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you." But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" And the angel said to her in reply, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God." Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

"You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus."

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Today, the Gospel carries the tone of a folk tale. Such accounts begin like this: "Once upon a time...", introducing the characters, the era, the place, and the theme. This story reaches its high point with the central plot; finally, there is the resolution.

Similarly, Saint Luke narrates the greatest story of all times in a popular and accessible manner. He presents not a tale conjured by imagination, but a reality woven by God Himself with human collaboration. The high point is: "You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus" (Lk 1:31).

This message tells us that Christmas is near. Mary will open the door for us with her cooperation in the Work of God. The humble girl of Nazareth listens in surprise to the angel's announcement. She was earnestly praying that God would soon send the Anointed One to save the world. Little did she imagine, in her modest understanding, that God had chosen her specifically to fulfill His plans.

Mary experiences tense, dramatic moments in her heart: she was and wanted to remain a virgin; now God proposes motherhood to her. Mary does not understand: "How can this be?" (Lk 1:34), she asks. The Angel explains that virginity and motherhood are not contradictory, but rather, through the power of the Holy Spirit, they are perfectly integrated. It's not that she now understands better. But explanation is enough for her, for she knows that the miracle will be God's work: "For nothing will be impossible with God" (Lk 1:37). Thus, she responds: "May it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38). Let it be! Let it happen! Fiat! Yes. Total acceptance of God's Will, somewhat blindly, but without conditions.

In that very moment, "the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (Jn 1:14). That folk tale becomes at the same time the most divine and most human reality. Pope Saint Paul VI wrote in 1974: "In Mary, we see the response that God gives to the mystery of man; and the question that man asks about God and his own life."

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “Open your heart to faith, O blessed Virgin, your lips to praise, your womb to the Creator. See, the desired of all nations is at your door, knocking to enter. Arise, hasten, open. Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to your word.” (Saint Bernard)

- “The Word, who found a home in the virgin womb of Mary, comes in the celebration of Christmas to knock once again at the heart of every Christian. Each of us is called to respond, like Mary, with a personal and sincere ‘yes’ placing oneself fully at the disposal of God.” (Francis)

- “The Annunciation to Mary inaugurates ‘the fullness of time’ (Gal 4:4), The time of the fulfilment of God's promises and preparations. Mary was invited to conceive him in whom the ‘whole fullness of deity’ would dwell ‘bodily’ (Col 2:9). The divine response to her question, ‘How can this be, since I know not man?’ (Lk 1:34), was given by the power of the Spirit: ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you.’ (Lk 1:35).” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, № 484)