

The Seed of the Woman

Fourth Sunday in Advent: Series B (18 December 2011)
Saint Luke 1:26-38

Dearly beloved, the very first command given to our first parents was this: **“Be fruitful and multiply”** (Genesis 1:28). But before our first parents began to be fruitful and multiply, they disobeyed God, ate the forbidden fruit, and brought sin and death into God’s very good creation. So God punished them, even as He promised a Savior to crush the serpent’s head. Immediately after God spoke these words, and before God clothed His shamed children with garments of skin, Adam took hold of God’s promise and named his wife. **“The man called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all living”** (Genesis 3:20). Ironic, isn’t it? This mother of all the living, because of sin, is now the mother of all the dying. For Eve could only give birth to children who would someday die. And yet, in the name Eve there is an expression of hope for the future through the promised Seed of the woman, for He alone brings life to all the living.

In today’s Holy Gospel, we see God at work again, miraculously bringing forth Life, this time to end death once and for all. In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin’s name was Mary. The angel came to her and said:

“Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!”

You can imagine Mary’s fear and surprise and wondering what sort of greeting this might be. It’s not every day an angel appears. So Gabriel continues:

“Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to Him the throne of His father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.”

The question Mary asks next is a logical one. **“How will this be, since I am a virgin?”** Mary is not naïve. She knows about the birds and the bees. She knows

the terms *virgin* and *mother* are mutually exclusive. In all of human history there had never been a virgin mother, even though God had worked other miracles. Although Sarah and Elizabeth were past the age of child-bearing, God gave each a child. Although Rebecca, Rachel, Manoah's wife, and Hannah were infertile, God opened up these barren wombs and gave each a child. In all six of these instances, God miraculously intervened. But each and every time He used the marital bond of husband and wife to bring about a child. Thus, you can understand Mary's question. It's quite practical. **"How will this be, since I am a virgin?"**

So Gabriel answers her:

"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, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God."

Which is to say: Don't go looking for an example of this in the past, Mary. You are a one-of-a-kind mother. A virgin mother. The Child conceived in your womb is not from Joseph, but from the Holy Spirit. He has a full compliment of your DNA and a full compliment of God's deity dwelling in Him (Colossians 2:9). Miracle of miracles, Mary, not only are you simultaneously *virgin* and *mother*, but the Child in her womb is simultaneously *Son of Man* and *Son of God*. It has to be this way, for every child of Eve conceived by a human father is a sinner and must one day die. But this Child is different. Conceived by the Holy Spirit, He is free from original sin. Thus, He does not have to die, even though He will willingly undergo death and the grave to conquer sin.

Do you see God's promises being fulfilled? In the Garden of Eden, God announced to the serpent that the Seed of the woman — not the man and the woman, but the woman — would crush his head (Genesis 3:15).

Later, when the time was closer, God foretold through the prophet Isaiah that **"the virgin"** — not a man and a woman, but the virgin — **"shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel"** (Isaiah 7:14).

Then, when the time had fully come, **"God sent His Son, born of a woman"** — not a man and a woman, but a woman — **"born under the law, to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons"** (Galatians 4:4).

Friends, what happened in Mary's womb at the angel's announcement is the foundation of what happened to you in Holy Baptism. Through water and the Word, the Spirit came upon you, the power of the Most High overshadowed you, you were born anew, and the Father called you holy—a son of God by adoption into His family. Saint John says it this way: **“But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God”** (John 1:12). Saint Paul adds: **“In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ”** (Galatians 3:26-27).

To all of this, Mary replies: **“Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.”** With these words, Mary provides us with a wonderful example of faith. God presents His will, His plan, His bidding to her. And even though being an unwed mother will mean ridicule for her, she submits to God's will. **“Not my will, but Yours, be done”** (Luke 22:42).

Submitting to God's will is not easy, is it? Especially when God permits you to endure times of unemployment, financial hardship, family struggles, or health issues. Learn from Mary and pray for Christian humility and wisdom to submit to God's will and speak back to Him: “Behold, I am Your servant; let it be to me according to Your Word.” You may not know all the details—how He is going to see you through today and tomorrow and so on—but you do have His Word that He will never leave you or forsake you (Romans 13:5), that He will deliver you (Psalm 50:15), that He will work all things for your good (Romans 8:28), and that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to you (Romans 8:18).

Today's Holy Gospel is the reason we confess every Lord's Day:

“I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, ...
who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven
and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary
and was made man.” [Nicene Creed]

From Eve until Mary, death reigned. But then God worked His miracle through a virgin mother. He brought into this world the Seed of the woman, who is both true God and true Man, to save us from our sins, and conquer death once-and-for-all. And so, when this God speaks, listen. What He promises, believe. Where He comes in Word and Sacrament, go and receive His good gifts. What else is there

to say to such a faithful, loving, and merciful God than this: **“Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to Your word.”**

In the name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Jesus Christ unto life everlasting.

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