

OUR LADY, STAR OF THE SEA, WEYMOUTH
HOMILY FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT
23RD DECEMBER 2018

We are in the final stages of our Advent journey, and if you haven't already there's still time to read the first two chapters of Luke's Gospel! So, four candles are lit, and it's Christmas Eve tomorrow when our focus really becomes directed onto Jesus.

Over the past four weeks we have had a careful selection of readings. We've been reminded of the second coming at the end of the world, we've had John the Baptist reminding us to prepare, we've had readings from other prophets and today we our readings bring our attention to Mary. And of course, all these are pointing towards Jesus, ultimately He is our main focus.

So, what about Mary? She is by far the most important Advent figure, for she sums up in her person the whole of the people Israel, that nation whose whole purpose was to prepare for the coming of our Lord and Saviour. Mary is the one the prophets were hoping for as we heard from the prophet Micah. She announces with the greatest clarity and joy the coming of the Messiah.

From ancient times, she is the one God chose to be the mother of his Son. That is so awesome, however hard I try I can't fathom what that would have felt. As we'll mention on Christmas day, I find it equally hard to fathom that we are all invited to be partakers in the Divine life; St Athanasius said "The Son of God became man, so that we could become God!" However, back to today.

People often speak about those they admire to encourage people to learn from their lives, be it a sports star or a TV personality or political activist..... People quote all sorts of famous faith filled people for similar reasons. Well, there is much we can learn from perhaps the most faith filled person there was, Mary. She was a woman of faith. We all know the story of how she believed and said let it be done to me according to your will, i.e. yes, when the angel Gabriel told her she would be the Messiah's mother! Mary also believed the news that Elizabeth was pregnant, despite her old age, and went to see her as quickly as she could.

Have you ever wondered why Mary hurried as quickly as she could? There are depths behind most words in Scripture, after all Scripture is God's Word! I concur with Fr. Julian Large, he suggests that maybe it was because Mary recognised that she had now found God's purpose for her life. Once that happens, nothing is as important.

And as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting Elizabeth says blessed are you who believed. So, Mary believed God's word. If we consider the person of Mary, we find in the Gospels she is a model of discipleship for us. She listened to the word of God that came to her through the Angel Gabriel. She pondered God's word in her heart. She asked questions, "how will this happen?" Be aware that she asked this question in faith, compare with Zechariah...

We would benefit by being like Mary. She is a role model par excellence. We need to have a deep love for the Word of God; we need to read the Gospels. We need to listen to God's Word. We need to pray with our bibles and ask questions. What does God's Word mean to me in my daily life? This is exactly what Jesus was doing which we heard in our reading from the book of Hebrews – he was quoting psalm 40 and relating it to his own life. Now seriously, if was good enough for Jesus to do it must be good for us as well! How is what Jesus says in the Gospel going to happen to me, in my life?

And remember what Geoffrey said last week about joy being different to happiness. Consider when Mary presents Jesus to Simeon in the Temple. She was filled with joy at that time, yet Simeon says a sword will pierce her heart. Mary ponders those words. We too benefit when we read the Bible and ponder God's Word, as I have suggested a moment ago. It may even help us find our God given purpose.

And then we need to be ready to do whatever God is asking us! Let Mary be an example to us to help us say "yes". And remember a disciple is someone who is trying to become like their teacher, so as disciples of Jesus, we need to say as He did "God, here I am, I am coming to do your will"! Will you do this you lovely people? Will you read God's word, ponder it, ask what it means in your personal life and then say "Yes God, I will do what you are asking"?

And just for a moment let's consider Mary's example further. One of the beautiful lessons from her life is its simplicity and quietness. She didn't make a big deal of who she was; many of the key events involving her happen almost silently. (Orthodox said we don't give Mary enough honour!) Often only a few people, and at times no-one, was there to pay special attention to the events involving her. (Annunciation, visitation, presentation, Jesus's childhood, Cana, the cross...)

Isn't most of our lives the same? I know I've asked you to read God's word and say yes to Him, yet most of this will be in simple quiet ways. The reality is the good we do is only seen by a small circle of people – be it at home, work or with friends or neighbours. You see it is in these simple areas of our lives that we can show who we are; and maybe the Spirit in us can touch the Spirit in those we meet. We don't need to be anything big, we just need to live with Jesus in our hearts and allow him to be seen through us.

Blessed are you, said Elizabeth to Mary, who believed.

And so blessed are all of you here as well, you who have heard and believe. For anyone here who doesn't yet believe, it's great you are here, for as St Paul says faith comes from hearing the word of God. Be open, and God can work in you. Everyone who believes, receives the same Holy Spirit. It's now up to us how we listen and respond.

Rev Jonathan de Kretser