

The Great Yes to God: Feast Day of St. Mary the Virgin: Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ
Lessons and Prayers Substituted for the 12th Sunday after Pentecost
August 15, 2021
The Rev. Emily Zimbrick-Rogers
St. David's Episcopal Church 8 am, 9.15 am, 5 pm

Today we are celebrating the Feast Day of St. Mary the Virgin: Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the Episcopal Church, her Feast Day is one of the major feasts that can be substituted for the regular Sunday readings and prayers, because it offers something for us to ponder today.

In case you need a reminder, we see Mary, this young woman from a small town, in the very first chapters of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Jesus' earthly father, Joseph, drops out of the story after Jesus is 12 and was found teaching in the temple, but Mary is still alive and appears in all four of the Gospels alongside Jesus at teachings and miracles, at the cross, and she is still present with the other disciples after Jesus' ascension in the Book of Acts.

Mary invites us to be present to God and reveals how God will be present to us. There is a circular nature to this mystery we see in Scripture. God shows up when people do not always expect it—like Moses with the burning bush, or Deborah in the battle. But God also shows up when people are seeking God. “My soul waits in silence for you, O God,” the psalmist says. Jesus says to seek after the kingdom of God, and we will find it. The letters of John say that God first loved us, and we respond with love. Paul, in the letter to the Galatians, affirms we are all

adopted as God’s children through his Son and through Mary, and we are given the Holy Spirit to confirm our status as God’s beloved children, but we have a role in responding to that adoption too—we cry out to God, who hears us and responds.

Mary is often depicted reading the Scriptures or praying in pictures of the annunciation. She is already seeking God when the angel Gabriel greets her and reveals she has been chosen to bear the Messiah. “Greetings, favored one. The Lord is with you.” Mary had a choice and could have said no to God’s request to be the human bearer of God. Local Episcopalian poet Jeanne Murray Walker has a lovely poem titled “Portrait of the Virgin who said no to Gabriel,” where she envisions that Mary was not the first young woman to be asked to invite God into her body. And Anglican poet Malcolm Guite writes in his poem “Theotokos” (which means God-bearer),

You heard His call and in your open ‘yes’

You spoke aloud for every living soul.

Yes, Mary replies to the angel. I welcome God into me. Mary responds to God’s invitation with joy. The readings assigned for her feast are filled with praise of God who is bringing about salvation for the world. “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord,” Isaiah proclaims. “I will bless the Lord at all times,” the psalmist sings. “Let us exalt the greatness of God. . . . Taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are they who trust in him.” In Luke’s Gospel, Mary sings a hymn of praise that

affirms God's goodness and greatness, his mercy, strength, help of both individuals and the whole people of Israel with particular attention for the poor, hungry, and needy.

Last Sunday, in Adult Forum, we were discussing Presiding Bishop Michael Curry's book, *Love is the Way*. One of the central themes is how individuals and communities can change the world for better through love. Bishop Curry reminds us we aren't acting in the world for love on our own strength—and the weight of the world cannot rest on just our shoulders. However, with the recognition of God and humans working together, the world can become a more just, loving place for all. Being a follower of Jesus is not simply believing in Jesus but acting out that truth in all aspects of our lives. We remember what job is ours, and what job is God's. We plant seeds, but God makes them grow.

God is the primary actor and agent of salvation, but Mary is also an agent of salvation, a co-creator of bringing Jesus into the world. The small domestic miracle of her pregnancy has worldwide, cosmic effect, reminding us of the interconnectedness of all things. Her personal yes, her private story, was a turning point in the story of God's people and the fulfillment of the plan of salvation.

In Genesis, we are told that humans are made in God's image and people throughout the centuries have pondered what that image means. Is it memory, reason, skill? Is it language or thought that makes us like God? My favorite

conception of being made in the image of God is the idea of being creators. God's first action is creative, bringing someone wonderful out of nothing, and God is constantly making the and creating the world. Author Madeleine L'Engle writes beautifully about us as co-creators with God, and Mary is the prime model of partnering in creation with God. This isn't simply about biology or physical birthing because that act of creation is not open to all people. God invites all of us to express mothering, life-giving, generative, creating qualities. Thomas Merton wrote that Mary is the mother of Christ in us, bringing Christ into our lives and her first yes to God's invitation enables us to participate in giving life around us. Each one of us has the invitation to partner with God in creation—bringing beauty, love, joy, possibilities to the world.

Last, but not least, Mary reveals to us how to be a disciple of Jesus. She is the first disciple, and present with Jesus from birth to after his death. While we often think of Mary as a model for women, and especially mothers, Mary is a gift to all people, no matter your gender or family status. She is considered the patron saint of all humanity, and St. Augustine wrote that the greatest honor and blessedness is not to have been the mother only, but also the disciple of Christ. She harbored the truth of Christ in her heart, not only Jesus' human body in her own body. She was the mother of the Word made flesh in Jesus and the model to the Church.

When God invited her to follow, she said yes. She was present with Jesus throughout his life, right to the cross. That circularity of welcome and care is noted in the Gospels, as Mary had cared for Jesus, at the cross, Jesus asked his friend to now care for his mother. Yet even at the sorrow of losing her son, first to death, and then again as he ascended and left the earth, she remained present and faithful to God. She was one of the many disciples praying in the Upper Room when the Holy Spirit came down on Pentecost. Many years before she had acted in faith to welcome God, and now, even though Jesus was physically gone, she—and all the other disciples—found the profound truth that God comes and remains with us and within us, through the Holy Spirit.

Mary has been called “full of grace” and we too can be called by that name as we meditate and emulate her example. The call of Mary is that God invites you to be full of grace and full of Jesus. We are invited today, and every day, to be Mary by Responding to God with yes. Birthing Jesus in ourselves and to the world as co-creators with God. Following Jesus as a faithful disciple, trusting that the Holy Spirit will lead and guide us.

O God, grant that we may share with blessed Mary the glory of your eternal kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.