

## **Fourth Sunday of Advent: December 20, 2020**

St. Vincent de Paul Church, Baltimore

A Gospel Reflection *(Luke:26-38)*

*Watch: Favored One. The Lord is with You.*

Mary was greatly troubled. Troubled, yes this sounds familiar. Some of us are experiencing this in the here and now. Perhaps our personal and national future has seemed too unpredictable, even dark. The present may feel uncertain and scary. We too long to be among those who hear the message, “Do not be afraid, you have found favor with God.” Like Mary and her Jewish brothers and sisters, we too long to be part of a just and holy kingdom that has no end. *(2 Samuel)*

The maiden from the small town in Galilee watched Gabriel, not just with her eyes, but with her heart and mind. She taught us that to watch means more than to “see,” it is to wonder, inquire, pay attention and respond. And so she did.

She was a believer in God’s steadfast love *(Psalm 89)*. This young Jewish woman knew these psalms, songs that told of the glory of God. Her love of God and belief that she was loved in return, motivated her questions and subsequent actions.

I have often wondered if Mary thought, “you have to be kidding me?” After all Luke revealed that Mary did both wonder and inquire as to what Gabriel meant when he addressed her as the “favored one.” Gabriel elaborated on this, “You will bear a Son and his name will be Jesus.” The angel assured her that God’s Spirit would overshadow her. Basically God would provide. After all nothing it would seem, is impossible for God.

And yet, didn’t Mary take a step into an abyss, a sort of dark, deep canyon, the unknown? She did this willingly so wouldn’t that seem like a free fall for her? Would there be a safety net? She chose to say an “OK,” a “Yes,” to that which she could not control nor completely predict. What trust, what love eh?

It is fair to think, to wonder, if we really are favored ones. If indeed we too are favored, life therefore ought to be negotiated with more ease, more guarantees of good fortune. Apparently not. We know the story of Mary's precious Son and how she observed and felt shattered when He experienced heartbreak, pain and disappointment. His mother came to know that favor with God involved relationship, love, loss, grief, beauty, hope and so on. Would Mary say yes if she had to do it all over? "I am the handmaid of the Lord."

Most of us have not experienced that our paths or solutions in life are made known to us by heavenly messengers who tell us how highly favored we are. We, most of us, have been through trials and tribulations and yet, here we are. We have lived to tell our stories. We have been brave enough to seek comfort, help and even have reached out to support and comfort others. We have worked to serve God and others in dark and light times. "How can this be?" It would seem we too have felt the power of God's Spirit. And when we think about it, we can recall occasions when God's love overshadowed us!

If like Mary, we continue to watch with our eyes, our hearts, and minds, we too can come to know the ways in which God's favor works in us and then we can come to understand that Our Creator pours holy favor into and over others too. If we are the clay, the work of God's hands (*Isaiah 1st Sunday of Advent*), our faith and experience has told us we are God's chosen ones, all of us. The Potter loves us unconditionally; loves all whom She has made. The Creator God shares glory with us, the created.

What seems like an abyss for us may be, similar to what it was for Mary. In that lonely space, the dark abyss, we can find the Spirit's great light and warm arms waiting to catch us and remind us, "Do not be Afraid."

Let us allow excitement, joy and wonder to fill our being because soon, very soon, in just 5 days we will be challenged anew to help make that Light, the Son of God shine for others. Watch: Favored One, the Lord is with YOU!

*Gerry Fialkowski*