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“May it be done to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38).

The Annunciation of the Lord

Isa 7:10-14; 8:10; Heb 10:4-10; Luke 1:26-38

Fra Angelico, the 14th century painter and Dominican friar, depicted Mary with a small book when the Angel Gabriel came to announce God’s invitation to her to be the mother of God. The visual message suggests that Mary was reading the Word of God when the Word of God became flesh in her. Perhaps she was reading today’s first reading from Isaiah 7 about a young woman being with child and realized that this text was literally coming true in her hearing.

Mary’s receptivity to the Word is the meaning and model for us of the Feast of the Annunciation. To read the Word with faith is to make it become flesh in our lives, to make it come true. Mary’s virginity was perhaps also more about her total receptivity and availability to God than about any physical state, though this became central to the theology of divine conception by the Holy Spirit. Jesus is son of Mary, Son of God, the mystery of the Incarnation.

Mary’s graciousness was first as a listener. To listen, to really hear, is what opens us to the voice of God. Mary was perfect at keeping the Great Commandment, the *Sh’ma*, which begins with the words “Hear, O Israel.” To hear is the ultimate form of hospitality, to welcome someone, as another Mary in Bethany welcomed Jesus, “Make yourself at home in me,” when he visited the house of Martha and Mary. By choosing to sit and listen to Jesus, Mary chose the “better part” while her sister busied herself with the meal, also a sign of hospitality.

Mary not only listened, she also pondered what she heard. She weighed each word in her heart, feeling its power and its potential implications. When the Angel quieted her fears and explained God’s purposes, Mary was already delving into the words, and when she was ready to respond, she responded not just to the present moment but to the full trajectory of what she was saying yes to.

She would conceive a child, carry it to term, give birth, parent and raise him as his first intimate teacher along with Joseph. They cherished, disciplined, taught and loved Jesus until the day he departed to fulfill his mission. Mary then accompanied him right to the end, standing at the cross as Jesus died. Finally, she prayed with the Apostles at Pentecost as they conceived by the Holy Spirit and gave birth to the

church, becoming themselves Christ-bearers, formed by the Word of God. We are that church, and each time we read God's Word with faith, Jesus becomes flesh in us.

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