



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

ANGELUS

Saint Peter's Square

Fourth Sunday of Advent, 24 December 2017

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good Morning!

This Sunday just before Christmas, we listen to the Gospel of the Annunciation (cf. Lk 1:26-38).

In this Gospel passage, we notice a contrast between the promises of the angel and Mary's response. This contrast is manifested in the *dimension* and *content* of the expressions of the two protagonists. The angel says to Mary: "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour 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 for ever" (vv. 30-33). It is a *long* revelation which opens unprecedented possibilities. The Child that will be born to this humble girl from Nazareth will be called Son of the Most High. It is not possible to conceive of a higher dignity than this. And after Mary's question in which she asks for an explanation, the angel's revelation becomes even more detailed and surprising.

On the other hand, Mary's reply is a *short* sentence that does not speak of glory. It does not speak of privilege but only of willingness and service: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (v. 38). The *content* is also different. Mary does not exalt herself before the prospect of becoming the mother of the Messiah, but rather remains modest and expresses her acceptance of the Lord's plan. Mary does not boast. She is humble and modest. She always remains the same.

This contrast is meaningful. It makes us understand that Mary is truly humble and does not try to be noticed. She recognizes that she is small before God and she is happy to be so. At the same time, she is aware that the fulfilment of God's plan depends on her response, and that therefore she is called to accept it with her whole being.

In this circumstance, Mary's behaviour corresponds perfectly to that of the Son of God when he comes into the world. He wants to become the Servant of the Lord, to put himself at the service of humanity to fulfil the Father's plan. Mary says: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord"; and the Son of God upon entering the world says: "Lo, I have come to do thy will, O God" (Heb 10:7). Mary's attitude fully mirrors this statement by the Son of God who also becomes the son of Mary. Thus Our Lady shows that she is in perfect accord with God's plan. Furthermore she reveals herself as a disciple of his Son, and in the *Magnificat*, she will be able to proclaim that God has "exalted those of low degree" (Lk 1:52) because with her humble and generous response, she has obtained great joy and also great glory.

As we admire our Mother for this response to God's call to mission, we ask her to help each of us to welcome God's plan into our lives with sincere humility and brave generosity.

After the Angelus:

Dear brothers and sisters, in prayerful expectation of the birth of Jesus, the Prince of Peace, let us invoke the gift of peace for the entire world, especially for the peoples who are suffering as a result of ongoing conflicts. I renew in particular my appeal, on the occasion of Holy Christmas, that those who have been kidnapped — priests, men and women religious and lay faithful — will be released and allowed to return to their homes. Let us pray for them.

I also wish to ensure my prayers to the people of Mindanao, Philippines, who were struck by a storm that claimed many victims and caused much destruction. May merciful God receive the souls of the departed and comfort those who are suffering as a result of this natural disaster. Let us pray for these people.

I warmly greet all of you, faithful of Rome and pilgrims who have come from various countries, families, parish groups and associations.

In these hours before Christmas, I suggest that you find a moment to pause in silence and in prayer before the Nativity scene to adore within your heart the mystery of the true Christmas, that of Jesus who approaches us with love, humility and tenderness.

And in those moments, remember to pray for me too. Thank you! Have a happy Sunday and a good lunch. *Arrivederci!*

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