

Advent (4B)

A protestant clergyman was visiting an orphanage and the children were each reciting their prayers for him to hear. One little boy who was a Catholic began to recite the Hail Mary. No, No said the clergyman we don't want to hear about her - go to the Creed. The little boy did so but stopped suddenly when he came to the words 'born of the Virgin Mary' and said 'here she comes again - what shall I do now Sir'. "Oh I give in', said the vicar.

Mary plays a pivotal role in God's design for our salvation. We've just heard in the Gospel what is known in Catholic circles as the story of the Annunciation. Since God the Son is to become man, He opts to be conceived, born and nurtured like every other mortal. He identified wholly with the human condition and that includes all the 'not so nice bits' like rejection suffering and death.

God so respects human freedom that he first seeks Mary's consent before He proceeds with His plan. He also seeks our co-operation before he can work in and through us. Christianity is a divine-human partnership.

From the Angel's point of there is no arm-twisting to force Mary's hand. Spirituality is about our life choices dovetailing with God's overall plan for us. Our 'yes' to God, like Mary's, must have no 'yes *but's*' attached to it.

Mary saying yes to God, however, didn't imply that all was going to be plain sailing from a human point of view. Even though the Angel addressed her as one highly favoured, it didn't follow that God was to shield her from suffering and that her faith would not be tested. The circumstances surrounding the birth of Jesus prove this point. It's hard to believe that Mary was left to give birth to Jesus in a miserable cave where animals sheltered. But God's ways are not our ways. If we

were giving Mary advice we would probably have strongly advised her against leaving Nazareth heavily pregnant, telling her it would be insane to set out on such a hazardous journey to Bethlehem. Caesar and his census could wait. But God had different ideas. He knew by allowing His Son to see the first light of day in abject circumstances it would be a blow to human pride as the Holy Father said recently.

Pride is at the root of all our rebellion against God. It was the downfall of Lucifer. The trouble starts when our self-will is out of sync with God's loving design for us. God also allowed the evil King Herod to bring Mary and Joseph more grief by allowing him to seek the life of their baby, but with God on their side they completely outfox the wicked King. As we read in the psalm 118: *"with God on my side, what can mortal man do to me"*

So Mary's 'yes' to God was never diluted from the day she first uttered it to the Angel before Jesus's conception to when she stood by the cross of her dying Son.

She will accompany us on our journey through life as well if we invite her. She will be with us in our joys and sorrows and help us to do God's will in good times and bad.