

## Advent 4B

We've just heard in the Gospel today the account of the Annunciation. Since God the Son is to become man, He opts to be conceived, born and nurtured like every other mortal. He identifies wholly with the human condition and that includes all the 'not so nice bits' like temptation, 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 standpoint there is no arm-twisting going on to force Mary's hand. Spirituality is about our free choices merging with God's overall plan for us. Our 'yes' to God, like Mary's, must, however, be wholehearted.

Her '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 her faith would not be tested. The circumstances surrounding the birth of Jesus prove this point. The 'highly favoured' Mary was left to give birth to Jesus in a cave where animals sheltered. Pope Benedict said that *'Jesus was born in a stable in order to humble human pride'*.

If we were giving Mary advice we would probably have strongly advised her not to leave Nazareth in the first place, telling her in her state it would be insane to set out on such a hazardous journey of roughly 90 miles to Bethlehem which would take over a week. There was no public transport then. Caesar and his census could wait. But God's ways are not our ways. Mary said in her *magnificat* prayer 'he has routed the proud of heart'. The Christmas message of peace and goodwill can only find a home in the hearts of humble people tried by suffering and set-

backs. John the baptist uses more colourful language to drive home the same point – *'every valley will be filled in every mountain laid low'*. We must allow the mountains of pride, arrogance and lust to be toppled and allow the valleys of our fears, hopelessness, depressions and despair to be filled in with healing, hope faith and love. Then the words of John the Baptist will be personally fulfilled in us.

The tyrant King Herod brought Mary and Joseph a lot of grief as well when he sought to end the life of their new-born, but with God on their side they outfox the wicked King. So also did the wise men. It's the same with us. God will turn everything to the advantage of those who love Him even when things initially don't turn out as they would have liked. He can 'write straight on crooked lines' as he did for Mary and Joseph. He can even turn the present awful pandemic to our advantage.

So Mary's 'yes' to God was never diluted from the day she first uttered it to the Angel Gabriel to when she bravely stood by the cross of her dying Son. She will help elicit and reinforce our 'yes' to God as well.