

Recently I came across a quote from Philaret of Moscow, who was a Russian Orthodox Metropolitan, equivalent to a bishop in the Catholic Church, during the nineteenth century.

“In the days of creation of the world, when God was uttering his living and mighty “Let there be,” the word of the Creator brought creatures into the world. But on that day, unprecedented in the history of the world, when Mary uttered her brief and obedient, “So be it,” I hardly dare say what happened then... the word of the creature brought the Creator into the world.”

The salvation of the world, the bridge to connect a fallen world to heaven, separated by the sin of our first parents, lies in the response of a fourteen year old girl.

And the world holds its breath.

The “yes”, the “so be it,” the response of this lowly handmaid of the Lord, gives God permission, if you will, to come into the world.

The creature’s word echoes the Creator’s word. The created gives birth to the Creator. It is a testimony about what God thinks of humanity.

Yes, God prepared Mary for this moment. She was immaculately conceived in order to be the perfect vessel to carry the one who is the source of all life.

But, as is always the case with God, he does not force anything on anyone. In God’s great love for us, we are granted freedom... the freedom to respond, just as Mary had the freedom to respond.

**We've heard many times,
and maybe even have said it ourselves,
"I'm only human! What do you expect?"**

**Our humanity becomes an excuse.
But God looks at our humanity as an opportunity.**

**As St. Gregory of Nyssa suggested...
Humanity is the opportunity
for the Invisible to be seen,
the Intangible to be touched,
and the Son of God to become the Son of Man.**

That opportunity was fulfilled in Mary's "Let it be."

**However, the story does not end with this encounter
between an angel and this lowly handmaid from Nazareth.
It would be easy to sit back and look with mere admiration
at this young girl and her response to the angel.**

**If we merely observe what happens in this gospel
then there is no point other than entertainment
and pious admiration
in standing in awe before the details of this story.**

**At some point, at some time,
every one of us must ask the question,
"What does this mean?"
"How am I different because of it?"**

**Each one of us is a new opportunity for God.
Today's Gospel reminds us
that this encounter between the angel and Mary
leads us to our own encounter.**

**As we prepare to celebrate the Nativity of the Lord
it would do us well to look beyond a child born in a stable.
The coming of the Lord,
the expression of unimaginable love,
is just as present now as it was on that dark night
some two thousand years ago.**

Today we are reminded that not only should we look for the coming of the Lord in our own lives, but also to bring Christ into our world. In a sense, we are called to be bearers of God.

This angel's message is for all of us who may think we have been left behind, too young, too old, too poor, too dumb, too late in life, or too sinful.

It is not so, proclaims today's Gospel. With God who can accomplish all things, there will be no excuse for anything short of greatness, holiness, or goodness.

The only thing that fouls up the plan of God is fear, and the first words out of the mouth of the messenger are: Fear Not.

Courage, that great virtue of a disciple is found not in the absence of fear, but in what we do in spite of it.

The glory of Christmas came about by the willingness of an ordinary person to obey God's claim on her life.

God does not favor people because of any quality within them. It is God's nature to bestow God's favor on the sinful, the weak, and undeserving. God grants favor to all who let the Gospel conceive new life in their hearts.

The scene from today's Gospel reading reminds us that God is always announcing and entrusting God's self to each one of us, to you and to me...

and the world holds its breath for our response.