

Fourth Sunday of Advent
December 24, 2023
Year of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Ark of the New Covenant

*“No word of God must be incredible to us, as long as no work of God
Is impossible for Him.”*

(Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible)

Over the last four weeks, we have celebrated the Season of Advent, a time of preparation. The Gospel passages for the last three Sundays have commanded that we “WATCH” (Mark 13:33-37) for a “MESSENGER” who is coming (Mark 1:1-8) to announce the advent of “ONE WHO IS GREATER” (John 1:19-28). Finally, today we read as the Gospel brings an announcement to a young girl that she will fulfill the promise of God given in the Garden long ago. Through the message of these four Gospel passages, we find a mosaic of love, beauty and sacrifice. This Messiah—Emmanuel—Christ—is the promised descendent in David’s line, a dynamic and powerful Savior, friend, Creator and light for all the nations. This morning’s Gospel passage adds the exclamation point, as we close out this Advent Season and our year of reflection on our Blessed Mother Mary.

Many times, we have heard this story of the Angel Gabriel coming to the virgin-child, Mary, to bring the Good News of the coming of the long-awaited Messiah. Luke sets the scene for us. At the Angel’s greeting, Mary is confused— *“greatly troubled”*—by all this. At first, she did not speak. Who was this creature before her? What could these words possibly mean? As the Angel continues, imagine, if you will, her thoughts: *You say that the baby I am to carry will be the promised Messiah? Don’t be afraid!? Rejoice!? Yes, it is joyous news, but terrifying at the same time!”*

Even in her day, this would have been impossible to believe. She begins to question. The answer she receives is just as astonishing: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.” She is now faced with a choice. Could she, in her free-will, have said “NO”? At this point in the story, Mary realizes that God has chosen her from all women—chosen her for all mankind. Her faith leads her to completely accept the words delivered by this messenger from God. Why should she doubt, for the last part of the Angel’s revelation proclaimed *“for nothing will be impossible for God.”*

This same message comes to us from the authors of the Vatican II document, “Lumen Gentium”: “The Father of Mercies willed that the incarnation should be preceded by assent on the part of the predestined mother, so that just as a woman had a share in the coming of death, so also should a woman contribute to the coming of life.” It goes on to say: “The knot of Eve’s disobedience was untied by Mary’s obedience; what the virgin Eve bound through her disbelief, Mary loosened by her faith.”

As we look to the celebration of the birth of Our Savior on Christmas morning, let us all with the words of Matthew Henry, consider the choice of our own discipleship in Christ and with Mary, utter the words of assent through our own faith, *“May it be done to me according to your word.”*

This is our faith. This, then, is our hope.

Holy Mary, in your kindness, pray for us.