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Commentary on the Gospel: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord"

Gospel for the 4th Sunday in Advent (Cycle B), and commentary.

Gospel (*Lk 1:26-38*)

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!"

But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor 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;

and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

And Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I have no husband?” And the angel said to her,

“The Holy Spirit will come upon you,

and the power of the Most High will overshadow you;

therefore the child to be born will be called holy,

the Son of God.

“And behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible.”

And Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

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Commentary

During this time of Advent our hearts are being enkindled with the desire

to welcome the Lord who is coming to us. Just a few days are left before celebrating Christmas. We are contemplating now the events that preceded the birth of Jesus. And today specifically the Church's liturgy invites us to meditate on the Annunciation of the angel Gabriel to Mary about her role in God's plans for the history of salvation.

Saint Josemaria liked to enter into this scene, as with all the Gospel passages, as though he were another person taking part in it: "Don't forget, my friend, that we are children. The Lady of the sweet name, Mary, is withdrawn in prayer. You, in that house, are whatever you want to be: a friend, a servant, an onlooker, a neighbour... I, at this moment, don't dare to be anything. I hide behind you and, full of awe, I contemplate the scene..."[1]

In the original Greek, the angel Gabriel addresses Mary with the words: *Jaire, kejaritoméne!* The term *jaire*, although often translated as “hail,” is a greeting whose literal meaning is “rejoice.” For whenever God is close, a serene joy fills the soul. “The word reappears during the Holy Night,” Benedict XVI points out, “on the lips of the angel who says to the shepherds: ‘I bring you good news of a great joy’ (*Lk 2:10*). It appears again—in John’s Gospel—at the encounter with the risen Lord: ‘The disciples were glad when they saw the Lord’ (*Jn 20:20*). Jesus’ farewell discourses in Saint John’s Gospel present a theology of joy, which as it were illuminates the depth of this word. ‘I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you’ (*Jn 16:22*).”[2]

The word *jaire* is related in Greek to *jaris*, which means grace. The term

kejaritoméne, often translated as “full of grace,” means literally that Mary “has been abundantly the object of grace” (v. 28). God has chosen Mary to be the Mother of his Son made man, and therefore, in light of Christ’s merits, she has been preserved from original sin from the moment of her own conception.

The angel announces to Mary that she will conceive and give birth to a Son, who will bear the name of Jesus (which is to say, Saviour). He will be the promised Messiah, who will receive the “throne of David,” as the “Son of the Most High,” of the true God.

Mary will conceive her Son virginally, without the help of a man, by the work and grace of the Holy Spirit: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you” (v. 35). During the wandering of the people

of God through the desert in search of the promised land, the presence of the Lord was revealed though a cloud covering the sanctuary; now it is the Holy Spirit who will cover with his shadow the Sanctuary of God's presence that is Mary's holy womb.

Mary, simply by saying "yes," becomes the Mother of the Son of God made man. Benedict XVI remarked: "the Church Fathers sometimes expressed this by saying that Mary conceived through her ear—that is to say, through her hearing. Through her obedience, the Word entered into her and became fruitful in her."[3]

We too, by listening to God's word and our unconditional obedience to what He tells us, will be able to welcome in our hearts Jesus, sharing in the joy of Mary and Joseph at the birth of the long-awaited Messiah.

[1] Saint Josemaria, *Holy Rosary*,
First Joyful Mystery.

[2] Joseph Ratzinger – Benedict XVI,
*Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy
Narratives*, Image Books, 2012, pp.
26-27.

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37.

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