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St. Thomas Church  
Advent 4B; 12.20.20  
2 Samuel 7:1-11; Rom.  
16:25-27; Lk 1:26-38

## Mary, Queen of Angels

Have you ever been visited by an angel? Have you ever wished you could be visited by an angel? Have you ever been mistaken for an angel? As we come closer and closer to Christmas, we find ourselves meditating on many miracles the greatest of which is the birth of Jesus Christ. At the very center of the miraculous is the arrival of the angel Gabriel bringing a most unexpected message to Mary: you will be giving birth to a grand miracle the likes of which the world has never seen.

I have always been puzzled by Mary and found her to be shrouded in mystery. Growing up as good Presbyterian Mary would always receive an honorable mention at Christmas time—finding her way into a warm and cozy manger scene and then disappear until Easter. And I must say, the same about angels. They are undeniably mentioned more than one thinks in the Bible, have critical roles like in today's gospel story but they have always had a bit of a fairy tale quality to them and therefore harder to believe they are real.

So, I had landed on a compromise. I hadn't abandoned the possibility of angels entirely but the angels I know most about—and maybe this is true for you as well—are the human ones, animated with the spirit of love, that send timely texts and cards, speak words of encouragement when we feel like giving up, and stick with us when we feel unlovable. In other words, they are real people, and they don't have wings. When God wants to talk to me, it is usually in a still soft voice—usually nothing dramatic—a still small voice.

I hope this sets the stage for what I most want to say this morning: I consider myself to be among the least likely to be visited by a heavenly being or the Virgin Mary, but I sure was wrong. Don't you hate it when you are wrong—when you are so certain that you are right?

About two or three years ago, I was at a St. Thomas staff retreat at the Sister of Joseph's Peace and Spirituality Center—right down the street on lake Washington in the Enatai neighborhood. During our meditation time, I decided to take a walk down one of the trails. I stopped at beautiful statue of the Virgin Mary. You know, our dear Roman Catholic brothers and sisters have an extraordinary devotion to Mary—she seems to be everywhere they are and is known by so many different names. I sat down on a comfortable bench. I began to pray. I was in a lot of pain. I was reflecting on my relationship with my mother who had died in a tragic way just a few years earlier. Like so many of our family relationships, and especially with our parents, my relationship with my mother was a very complicated and painful one. Her years of depression and alcoholism had taken its toll. Since my time as a young boy, I had prayed that she would be healed and her faith in God restored.

I prayed for God to intervene—I would have welcomed the intervention of Mary, angels, a therapist, a treatment center. But my mother's healing and the healing of our relationship never came in her lifetime. And so, as you might have guessed, I was just a little bit shocked when I hear a beautiful angelic voice identify herself as the Virgin Mary, "Steve, your mother is now well enough to receive your forgiveness. Let my beloved Son Jesus help you. Steve, your mother is now well enough to receive your forgiveness." She had to say it twice because I didn't believe her the first time. I took a deep breathe, and with all the strength I had, which didn't seem like a lot the time, I said, "Yes." And I immediately felt lighter, a lot lighter as the burdens I had been carrying for so many years were lifted.

I was left in a state of bewilderment. I realized that there was so much I didn't understand about Mary. So often this time of year, we only think of Mary as primarily the humble servant of God, an empty vessel with little spiritual power on her own, who despite her fears and surprise consents to becoming the Mother of Jesus: "Let it be with me according to your word." Does anyone in addition to me, believe that her process of saying "yes" to the infinite possibilities of God took a little longer than today's story implies? It almost sounds like magic or that it was as simple as a light switch getting turned on.

Because Mary was fully human, it doesn't take a lot of imagination to envision that her nine months of pregnancy was a time of deep soul searching and soul building as she contemplated the implications of saying, "yes" to God over and over again with no assurances as to how it was all going to turn out in the end.

“Saying yes” in the middle of the night wondering if there would be enough food for the baby.

“Saying yes to God” after each time she had to explain herself to her family and friends how she became pregnant out of wedlock.

“Saying Yes” to God after her family is nowhere to be found when she is looking for a room in the inn.

“Saying yes” On the hard dusty road from Nazareth to Bethlehem—a 90 mile hike a week before you are to deliver. Bet she had other things to say to Joseph other than “yes, dear!”

With the animals, in the dark cold cave, the pungent smell of animals—hard to call it a birthing room—even harder to say “yes.”

Mary kept saying “yes” until her doubts were healed, and her compassion made deeper because of all she endured. She, like her son, fully understands our human condition. Her message to us is even more real because of what she endured in giving birth but also her witness to her Son’s suffering on the Cross. Even though she may be placed on a pedestal in a grand cathedral one of the surest places she can be found is in the hearts of mothers and fathers who struggling with responsibilities and challenges as parents. Like her son Jesus, Mary is fully incarnated as one of us and full of grace.

All parents’ conscious of all the risks of bringing children into this troubled world have their own version of struggling to get to “yes.” It takes great faith to give birth to love in world where there is so much pain, hurt and even hate. So many of you parents out there—including grandparents and other caregivers—are courageously making this faith walk daily—as you attempt to protect and care for your children and grandchildren during a season of great exhaustion, worry, and uncertainty on top of all that goes with the holidays. Maybe you are a parent with grown children who don’t talk to you any more or maybe you are a parent who holds deep remorse for the harm you may have done to your child or the harm your child has done to you.

Regardless, of where you are this day, I encourage you to reach out to Mary, our spiritual mother. When Mary visits with her compassionate presence, she brings divinely inspired love, and loves you as a mother and is relentless in her efforts to help you connect with her beloved Son Jesus even if He is no where to be found this Advent season or if you fear will not be arriving in time for Christmas.

Mary's power is in her complete humanity perfected through grace—a humanity perfected through grace and infused with divinity. This is a power available to us as well. She is a divinely infused mother who desires to visit us, inviting us to heal broken relationships in our lives and help us see the heart of God. I am willing to call her the queen of angels and my spiritual mother because of the way she has visited me and helped give birth to my healing. I hope and pray that Mary and all the angels of mercy will visit you soon as well! Amen.

### **Footnotes:**

Mary is to be revered—and to some—even venerated as the expression of the divine feminine incarnate—I'll need to think about that some more! The Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung thought it might be so. For centuries Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christians have believed that at end of her life on earth her soul and body went directly to heaven—no corruption of her body, no purgatory, no intermediary steps.

When Pope Pious 12 made the doctrine of Mary's Assumption to Heaven official, Carl Jung was ecstatic calling it the most important happening in the West since the reformation in the 1500's. Why? Because in Mary he saw the divinity of God reaching an important balance between the masculine and feminine energies in this world. In this tension he believed the greatest healing and creativity could be made possible and Christianity could be rescued from being an overly patriarchal, barren, and violent religion.

Over the centuries many have witnessed her appearing to a diverse number of people on almost every continent. As she tends to choose the least likely ones—something I believe her son taught her—an Aztec convert named Juan Diego in 1531, a 14-year-old shepherd girl named Bernadette who was out gathering firewood in 1858. Three shepherd children in Portugal in 1917 and the list goes on. She goes by many names: Our Lady of Guadalupe, Our Lady of Lourdes, our Lady of Fatima to call out some of the better known. Regardless of her name, Mary's message is always the same: work for peace around the world, seek healing, turn to my Son Jesus, and be saved.