

## Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.

rebellion. (10) Now fear God, Joseph, so that these things do not happen in your house." (11) Fearing God, Joseph took her into his own possession. (12) And he said to her, "Mary, I took you from the temple of the Lord and now I bring you into my house. I am going out to build houses, but I will come back to you. The Lord will protect you."

## The Sacrament of Marriage

Recently there was mass E-mail from an unchurched couple seeking a church for a marriage. Many people who rarely or ever join in Christian worship do not feel married unless they have their vows heard in a church. It was not always so. Early Christian marriage was simply an agreement between families and a registering of legal documents. It is said, perhaps apocryphally, that about the year 500, fathers and mothers, supposedly in Italy, fearing that their widowed daughters might lose inheritance if documents were lost and the bridegroom's family proved dishonest, asked the priest to witness and record the nuptials in the parish register. With a priest you also got prayers, and gradually all "morphed" into the Nuptial Mass.

Marriage was the last named of the Seven Sacraments. Hincmar of Reims, d. 882, first called marriage a Sacrament; Thomas Aquinas, d. 1274, said it conferred Grace. From the 11<sup>th</sup> century the church claimed total jurisdiction over marriage. After the Reformation that jurisdiction continued in the English branch of our church until Hardwick's Marriage Act passed out of Parliament in 1753. The act made provision for secular marriage.

## The Advent Blessing

May Almighty God, by whose providence our Savior Jesus Christ came among us in great humility, sanctify you with the light of his blessing and set you free from all sin.. *AMEN.*

May he whose second coming in power and great glory we await, make you steadfast in faith, joyful in hope, and constant in love. *AMEN.*

May you, who rejoice in the first Advent of our Redeemer, at his second Advent be rewarded with unending life. *AMEN.*

And the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be upon you and remain with you for ever. *AMEN.*

**There are alternative Gospels for Christmas.**

**Please prepare St. Luke 2:1-20, and St. John 1:1-14**

## The Fourth Sunday of Advent



## The Annunciation

Sandro Filipepi called *Botticelli* 1445-1510

Uffizi, Gallery. Florence, Italy

Tempera on wood, 150 x 156 mm

Commissioned in 1489 by Benedetto di Ser Giovanni Guardi for the church of Castello (today Santa Maria Maddalena dei Pazzi)

## Today's Gospel St. Luke 1:26-38 [Year B, Advent 4]

✠ IN THE SIXTH MONTH THE ANGEL GABRIEL WAS SENT BY GOD TO A town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.' But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her,

## Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.

'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him 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 ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' 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 holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.' Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her.

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## The Cost of Discipleship

In recent years we've all become familiar with the suffering of women in some Moslem countries. We've learned of veils and *burkas*, the lack of equal rights and denial of freedom of movement. We've learned that strict Islamic law demands that terrible penalties be exacted upon women who become pregnant out of wedlock. Many such women suffer execution by beheading or stoning. The press often reports the appalling inequity that the father of the unborn child is not always charged with a crime, let alone a capital one.

Conditions were nearly the same in Jesus' day. Women were second class citizens or, as some maintain, non-citizens. If women had relations with men not their husbands they were normally stoned. In Jesus' time too, the male partner was not charged with breaking the seventh commandment, *You shall not commit adultery*, unless the woman was married. The single woman was condemned, but her male partner got off scot-free.

Mary knew this. Perhaps such horrors had happened to a friend. She knew the possible cost of an unexplained pregnancy. She was a young woman of unique courage. She risked her own life to accept God's gift of his Son. She risked her life for us.

## The Fourth Sunday of Advent

### For Your Amusement

Here is a fanciful account from one of the many unauthorized "Gospels," the Protoevangelium of James (c.140 - 170). This work attributed to one *James* was never admitted to the canon of Scripture but it colors popular tradition even to our own day. It is one of the sources for the supposed names of Mary's parents, Joachim and Anna, of Mary's childhood piety and of the tradition that Joseph was an elderly widower.

Chapter 8 (1) And her parents went down, marveling at and praising and glorifying the Lord God because the child [Mary] had not turned back to look at them. (2) While Mary was in the temple of the Lord, she was fed like a dove and received food from the hand of an angel. (3) When she turned twelve, a group of priests took counsel together, saying, "Look, Mary has been in the temple of the Lord twelve years. (4) What should we do about her now, so that she does not defile the sanctuary of the Lord our God?" (5) And they said to the high priest, "You have stood at the altar of the Lord. Go in and pray about her. And if the Lord God reveals anything to you, we will do it." (6) And the priest went in taking the vestment with twelve bells into the holy of holies and prayed about her. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord stood before him, saying, "Zachariah, Zachariah, depart from here and gather the widowers of the people and let each one carry a staff. (8) And the one whom the Lord God points out with a sign, she will be his wife." (9) So the heralds went out to the whole surrounding area of Judea and the trumpet of the Lord rang out and all the men rushed in.

Chapter 9 (1) Throwing down his ax, Joseph went out to meet them. (2) And after they had gathered together with their rods, they went to the high priest. (3) After receiving everyone's rod, the high priest went into the temple and prayed. (4) When he was finished with the prayer, he took the rods and went out and gave them to each man, (5) but there was no sign among them. Finally, Joseph took his rod. (6) Suddenly, a dove came out of the rod and stood on Joseph's head. (7) And the high priest said, "Joseph! Joseph! You have been chosen by lot to take the virgin into your own keeping." (8) And Joseph replied, saying, "I have sons and am old, while she is young. I will not be ridiculed among the children of Israel." (9) And the high priest said, "Joseph, fear the Lord your God and remember what God did to Dathan and Abiron and Kore, how the earth split open and swallowed them because of their