

## Fourth Sunday of Advent

Year C

Mi 5:1-4a  
Ps 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19  
Heb 10:5-10  
Lk 1:39-45

George F. Riley, O.S.A.

*“Blessed is she who trusted that the Lord’s words to her would be fulfilled.”*

The year 1809 was a part of a period of history not greatly different from our own time. Military might was the dominant theme of the day. Napoleon and his armies held the upper hand and seemed destined to rule the world. Battles and victories made newspaper headlines. And most people thought that these really were the important and significant events of that time. This was naturally so because wars and armies were enormous. They hoodwinked the public.

But something else took place in the year 1809 that never made newspaper headlines and very few people noticed. In that year, Charles Darwin was born. As a result of his research, the thinking of the entire scientific world was reshaped.

In that year Abraham Lincoln was born, and we are familiar with his courage – the courage which led the United States in the darkest moments of its history.

In that year William Gladstone was born and history proved him to be one of the brightest statesmen of the British empire.

In that year Alfred Tennyson, Edgar Allen Poe, and Oliver Wendell Holmes were born, and their writings still inspire the minds of millions.

In that year, Cyrus McCormick was born and his invention changed the way the world harvest its crops.

In a word, that year, 1809, was not known for its important battles, but rather for the babies that were born. Napoleon is gone and all but forgotten. But the contributions made by the babies born in that year will live on until the end of time.

That was the scenario 2,000 years ago when the armies of Caesar marched – the earth trembled. People paid attention to this. They paid attention to big things, big noises, powerful things. No one really thought that the really important events of that time were taking place in the quiet and forgotten hills of Judea. Soon Elizabeth would give birth to a child and call him John. Mary would give birth to a child and call him Jesus. And those two men would, literally, reshape the thinking of the entire world.

In the history of the world there was only one woman who was completely and absolutely pleasing to God. And that is the Blessed Mother. This was pointed out to Mary by the Archangel Gabriel himself at the Annunciation. For he greets Our Lady with the words: “Hail, Mary, full of grace.” Note the words “full of grace.” If sanctifying grace makes us pleasing to God, and if Mary has this grace in all its fullness, then she must

have been completely pleasing to God.

Hence the reason why Christians have always taken Mary for their model of discipleship. For only insofar as we approach her ideal will we be pleasing to God, will we be sensible, will we be saints. By obedience to God's will, by acceptance, and by silence will we be prepared to welcome Christ. Mary is the exemplar of these virtues.

First, we see her obedience. When the angel again appeared to Joseph and told him to go back to Nazareth for Herod was dead, Mary didn't moan and complain. No thought of the fact that she had to leave all the friends she had made in Egypt...or tear Jesus away from the other eight or nine year old boys with whom he had played. It was her duty to follow Joseph on another journey to another strange place. Mary knew instinctively what her son was later to teach us as disciples – obedience to God's will.

The second virtue of Mary was acceptance. Mary made no reservations when she answered Gabriel with her Fiat. Her word was absolute and final for all time. She didn't, as many married people do when they take each other for better or for worse, accept only the better and cry about the worse. Mary accepted poverty, not with the hope that God would never give it to her, but as an actuality. Mary accepted sickness and death and the death of her own husband and her divine son. Mary accepted the poor substitute of Saint John the Evangelist and took on the world of sinners as her children in place of her stainless son.

Mary did this not for the few brief hours of her life here on earth, but for centuries, for all eternity. For Christ told her at the age of twelve that he must be about his father's business, and his father's business was Mary's will.

The third virtue of Mary is her silence. There are recorded only six instances in which she spoke, and it is interesting to note that none of these six instances saw Mary exceed one terse sentence, with the exception of her Magnificat.

Obedient to God's command we gather here to worship Him, to accept the great gift of His Son as our savior, and to find the wisdom and strength Christ in the silence of our waiting hearts. Mary and Elizabeth waited. Tonight the world waits. We wait for the Savior of the world to be reborn in the minds and in the hearts of mankind. We know that waiting can be boring. But as the anticipation gets nearer, the excitement begins to mount. Let that excitement turn to action in the joyful days that stand before us. Through us, Christ can take on new flesh. Through us, Christ can become real to people. Through us, Christ can light up their life with hope. Out there in all of our lives there is an Elizabeth who needs our visit. And as we wait, like Mary, we must go out of ourselves to others.

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