

For with God nothing shall be impossible

On the fourth Sunday of Advent

Open my eyes to see, my ears to hear, my heart to receive and my mouth to proclaim the Word of God.

AMEN.

As a mother and a grandmother nothing gets me quite as excited as news of a new baby. They come in the most incredibly delicious packages, they smell wonderful and they feel indescribably warm and wonderful in your arms. I love shopping for little pink and blue things, little sailor suits and princess dresses.

I love belonging to a church that welcomes each new child into the family, a place where babies are brought to be blessed and baptized.

I even love babysitting cranky, vegetable refusing, mummy-demanding, grandchildren!

But everyone isn't as fortunate as I am in the richness my children bring to my life or in my excitement over newborns, or babes about to be.

The Bible tells stories of great men and women who longed well into their senior years for a baby: and only by a miracle did they conceive and a child be born. Abraham and Sarah longed for Issac for many years: so long indeed that when the angel appeared and told Abraham, Sarah laughed at the absurdity of her bearing a child at her age. But it happened.

John the Baptist's father Zackery was so stunned at the news that his elderly wife, Elizabeth, was about to be pregnant that his disbelief was punished with the loss of speech until the child was born and named.

There even is an old legend that Christ's grandparents, were childless until an angel appeared in their old age to announce that they would soon have a child, Mary.

But imagine the mixed emotions of Mary, when an angel appeared to tell her that she had been chosen to bear the saviour of the world. Even the greeting, "Hail Mary, full of grace..." wouldn't have been sufficient to dispel her doubts and fears. This girl is a virgin. She has never known a man. How can she be pregnant? What will she do? What will happen to her? Will her fiancée have her stoned, as he would have been entitled to do? Will she be put aside as soiled goods? Her heart and mind must have been racing.. And yet, she consented.

She must have known that God had His reasons.

So, she agreed.

She was faithful, a good Jewish girl raised by her parents to honour and love her God. And she said 'yes'.

Then the angel went to Joseph and told him that he was soon be the earthly father of the child Mary was to have, which was of the Holy Ghost: and so Joseph remained with her, and did not dismiss her, but cared for her and the child, whom we all know as Jesus or Emmanuel, meaning, "God is with us".

But imagine knowing from the very beginning, through the teachings of your faith, that the Messiah you were going to give birth to would have to die, and knowing EVEN before the child is born that you will outlive him, and that his will be an awful death.

Now, it isn't difficult for me to imagine giving one's life to save a child or grandchild. But it is impossible for me to imagine giving a child to death to save me or anything, or anybody, else. I just love children far too much and I only want good things for them.

But that is what both God and Mary chose to do.

God loved us so much that He gave us this wonderful baby, the Christ child, to live and share our lives, and then, to face the cruelest of deaths: and all just for us.

And Mary, too: she chose to face the humiliation of being unwed and pregnant; the bearing and birth of a child that she knew she would love desperately ... but a child with a destiny already foretold, a destiny that would end in pain and loss ... and her son, her beloved son, dead.

For me, that is all part of the wonderful miracle that is Christmas.

God and Mary and Jesus, all loving us so very, very much.

So how are we to respond?

Advent is a time of preparing for Christ's arrival ... for looking at the errors of our way and repenting of them. And because God does love us so very much, as we go through the process of considering how we are living our lives, one of the things most of us really need to repent about is that we **are not** thinking of ourselves as God thinks of us.

When we think of ourselves, too often we mutter about unworthiness, rant about our lack of self-discipline; bewail broken promises and the lack of Christmas spirit. And many greet the coming of Christ in depression and which despair threatens to overwhelm them. Do we ever consider how we devalue God and His gifts and sacrifices for us when we do this?

We need to draw back and think, as Mary must have done, that there must be something incredibly special about each of us, for God to love us so much. Jesus Christ died for you and me and in doing so made us citizens with the saints.

Christmas comes to bring light and truth to a world of darkness and lies.

Christmas comes to replace light and truth in the darkness and lies of each of our lives.

Christmas comes to save you and me from bondage.

And for all this we thank our God and His Son Jesus Christ, born also the son of a young Jewess, in a distant stable, under the hot desert sun. As we draw nearer to

the day of celebration of His birth, and as we prepare ourselves for the promised child, let us not forget to say a 'thank-you' that Mary said 'yes' to be Mother to His Son and 'yes' to our salvation.

May your Christmas and every day of your life be blessed with the knowledge of how greatly you are loved and valued by God. AM
EN.