

The Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 18, 2005

*2 Samuel 7:4,8-16
Psalm 132 or 132:8-15
Romans 16:25-27
Luke 1:26-38*

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

A few days ago Public Radio aired a story about “honor killing” in Afghanistan. Honor killing.

It had to do with abduction – kidnapping – in the tribal areas of that country. Apparently, kidnapping for ransom is an old and common tradition among those fine people. If a man is kidnapped, ransomed and freed, he is greeted with a great celebration by his family. If a woman is kidnapped and somehow freed (women are rarely ransomed), she is killed – killed by a member of her family on the assumption, without any investigation, that she has been dishonored, and thereby she has dishonored her family.

That happens today. It sort of brings a new dimension to the sweet story of the Annunciation, doesn’t it?

Who is this Mary who can say to an angel, “Let it be to me according to your word?” She is not the serene woman of the icons, tenderly holding the baby Jesus – calm and composed. She is not the heartbroken mother weeping at the foot of the cross as that baby, grown to manhood, is crucified. She is not even the distraught mother looking for her wayward son in the streets of Jerusalem and finally finding Him in the Temple.

Mary is a young girl – a teenage girl – betrothed, which really means “single” in a small town – Nazareth – finding herself suddenly “favored of God” and pregnant.

Mary says, “Let it be to me according to your word,” knowing full well that the village will gossip; that people won’t believe a word of it; that Joseph would have every right to abandon her, and that probably, she would die.

Could Mary have said “no?” Could she have denied herself to God? Could she have refused to do His will? That’s not so strange an idea; people deny God all the time. We call that sort of behavior sin. Mary is for us the symbol of the very antithesis of sin. Mary is the symbol of absolute, unqualified faith. She knows that if it is of God – no matter how unlikely and inexplicable – it must be right and good. In a few words she commits herself to all that is right and good.

In those few words a teenage girl in a tiny village opens the world – our world – to the presence of the living God, the Creator becoming one with His creation. In those few words the world is changed forever.

You know, we could use a hero or a heroine in this complex, relativistic age of ours. We could use one who can see and hear angels delivering the message of God to His children. We could use a double dose of faith and commitment. What greater and more perfect model might we have than Mary?

In His Holy Name.