

Mary is a model for saying yes to God



Teacher Note

The Church is holy ... Her holiness shines out in the saints; in Mary, she is already all-holy.
(The Catechism of the Catholic Church 867)

Mary, the mother of Jesus has a special place in the Church community. Mary was called to participate in God's family in a special way, by saying yes to God to be the Mother of Jesus.

Mary is very important to Catholics and is sometimes referred to as the Mother of the Church. Throughout her life, from the time the Angel Gabriel appeared to her, Mary always said yes to what God asked of her. Catholics celebrate the event of Mary saying yes to God at the Feast of the Annunciation.

Mary is a model to people of being faithful and saying yes to God. She is acknowledged and honoured as being the mother of Jesus and all people in God's family.

The Annunciation

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, you who enjoy God's favour! The Lord is with you.'

She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, 'Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favour.

Look! You are to conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus.

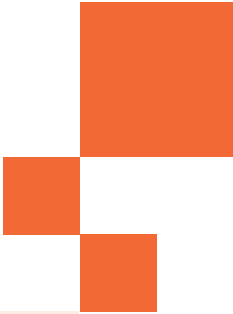
He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob for ever and his reign will have no end.'

Mary said to the angel, 'But how can this come about, since I have no knowledge of man?'

The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God.

And I tell you this too: your cousin Elizabeth also, in her old age, has conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, 'for nothing is impossible to God.'

Mary said, 'You see before you the Lord's servant, let it happen to me as you have said.' And the angel left her. [Luke 1:26-38]



Background to the Scripture

Mary, was betrothed to a man called Joseph. This means that she was committed to be his wife. Today people would say she was engaged. She was as the Gospel states, a virgin as she had never been with a man.

Jewish weddings involved three stages. First, there was the engagement. This was often prearranged by the parents or a matchmaker while the couple were still young children. Marriages were primarily seen as the union of families and the continuing of the family line. They were not primarily unions of love, as people expect today. Of course, in the course of time husband and wife could become deeply bonded by a genuine love and caring for each other. But it was procreation, especially the bearing of sons, that was the first priority.

Love might or might not come later; it was secondary. And it was only relatively recently that the Catholic Church itself put the two ends of marriage – love and procreation – as equally important. It took quite a while in the Church for the idea that a deep Christian love could be expressed through sexual intercourse, that it involved a deep mutual giving of one's whole self to the spouse and that it was not just a regrettable but unavoidable means to procreate.


Later came the betrothal. This was a legally binding relationship lasting for one year. During this period the couple lived apart and had no sexual relations. If either party did not want at this stage to go through with the marriage, there had to be a divorce. And the penalty for having sexual relations with a betrothed virgin was stoning to death for both. The third stage was the marriage itself.

Joseph faced a serious dilemma, not to mention his feeling of shock, when he found that his betrothed was already pregnant and not by him. It seemed an open and shut case of adultery.

And imagine the feelings of Mary herself in this position! How was she to explain that she was pregnant by the power of God? Who would believe a story like that? If Joseph felt outraged and betrayed, one would understand. Most men would have planned vengeance at such an insult to their manliness and the possibility of becoming the laughing stock of the other men in the village.

God's messenger, the angel Gabriel, enters the house and greets her in words that alarm her: Mary "was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean".

But the angel goes on to reassure Mary, although in language that must have confused her even more. Basically she is being told that she is going to be the mother of a son. But this is no ordinary son. The angel describes him in extraordinary language which, in fact, recalls many passages from the Old Testament referring to the Messiah.



He is to be called Son of the Most High, a title which can mean the divine Son of God or the Messiah.

Mary is even more puzzled and disturbed. How can she conceive a son when she has never been with a man.

The angel replies by explaining that “the Holy Spirit will come upon you.” The conceiving of this child is clearly to be the direct work of the Holy Spirit. The Father is God himself and the child is the divine Son of God, who, while remaining God, will “be made flesh”. From the moment of conception the child is fully God and fully human.

It is doubtful if, even after these explanations, that Mary really understood the implications of what she had been told. But she recognised the messenger as coming from God and, in deep faith and trust, accepted what she was being asked to do and be. She said an unconditional ‘Yes’ to what God had asked of her.

She is a great model for all Christians that are called to have faith and say yes to God and participate in God’s family the Church.

The Hail Mary

Since Mary is so close to her son Jesus, she can bring people’s prayers closer to Jesus.

Catholics pray the Hail Mary to ask the Mother of Jesus to pray for them and to recall when Mary said ‘yes’ to be the mother of Jesus.

<i>Hail Mary, Full of grace, the Lord is with you.</i>	The first part of the Hail Mary is composed of the Archangel Gabriel’s praises of Mary found in the Gospel. <i>The Annunciation [Luke 1:26-38]</i>	When people say this they remember how special Mary was. She was chosen from every woman to be the Mother of Jesus. Mary agrees to be the Mother of Jesus.
<i>Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus.</i>	These are the words with which Mary’s cousin Elizabeth greets her. Elizabeth is the first person who called Mary “blessed”. <i>The Visitation [Luke 1:39-44]</i>	This part of the prayer reminds people that Mary continues to have a special place in God’s family and helps people grow closer to God.
<i>Holy Mary, Mother of God, Pray for us sinners, now and at the hour our death.</i> <i>Amen</i>		This part of the prayer reminds people to ask Mary to pray to God for them so they can be strong and live as Jesus taught.



Catholics pray the Angelus

The Angelus is a special prayer that reminds people of Mary saying yes to God and her participation in bringing about God's family on earth, through the birth of Jesus.

The prayer commemorates the appearance of the Archangel Gabriel to Mary with the great news, she was to be the mother of Jesus.

For centuries people have prayed the Angelus three times a day; dawn, midday and dusk. The Angelus is a meditation on the words of Mary who called herself 'the handmaid of the Lord'. Mary offered herself in service to God.

In some places it is a custom for the bells of churches and monasteries to ring and remind Catholics to stop what they are doing and pray the Angelus.

The Angelus

The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary,
R. And she conceived of the Holy Spirit.

Hail Mary...

Behold the handmaid of the Lord:
R. Be it done unto me according to Your Word.

Hail Mary...

And the Word was made flesh,
R. And dwelt among us.

Hail Mary...

Pray for us, O holy Mother of God.
R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Let us pray: *Pour forth, we beseech You, O Lord,
Your Grace into our hearts;
that as we have known the incarnation of Christ,
your Son by the message of an angel,
so by His passion and cross
we may be brought to the glory of His Resurrection.
Through the same Christ, our Lord.*

Amen.