



Advent 4

THE NEW SHOFAR

Mary's "yes" is the purest example of true faith. She places her will firmly in God's hands and blindly follows. Let us look no further than Mary to find that the walk of absolute faith comes first in the surrendering Allene vanOirschot

Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you

As early as **110 AD** in the early Church, St. Ignatius of Antioch proclaimed that *Our God, Jesus Christ, was conceived by Mary*. This truth of the Divine Maternity was confirmed by other early Church Fathers and solemnly defined as dogma by the Council of Ephesus in **431 AD**. It is interesting to highlight that even Luther, Calvin and Zwingli preserved it intact in their systems of doctrines.

Called in the Gospels “the mother of Jesus” (**Jn 2:1**), Mary is acclaimed by Elizabeth, at the prompting of the Spirit and even before the birth of her son, *as the Mother of my Lord (Lk 1:43)*. In fact, the One whom she conceived as man by the Holy Spirit, who truly became her Son according to the flesh, was none other than the Father’s Eternal Son, the second Person of the Holy Trinity. Hence the Church confesses that Mary is truly “Mother of God” (*Theotokos* – is the Greek word).

Mary Mother of God is not a Roman Catholic invention

Important: It was *not* some Medieval pope or council that gave Mary the title of *Mother of God*. The Holy Spirit, 33 years before the Church's foundation, inspired Elizabeth to exclaim: *And how have I deserved that the mother of my Lord should come to me? (Lk 1:43)*.

Who then is this “Lord” about whom Elizabeth is talking? The Aramaic/Hebrew word for “my Lord” is **Adonai**. The Jews always used **Adonai** as the name of God once they decided that the name of God was too sacred for a human to pronounce. The **Adonai**, the “**Lord**,” Elizabeth was talking about is the Mother of one **Adonai**, Mary the Mother of the Son of God.

On the day of the Annunciation and the Incarnation, the Archangel Gabriel, the angel who stands in the presence of God, and sent by God (**Lk 1:19**), said to Mary: *Fear not, Mary, for you have found grace with God. Behold, you shall conceive in your womb, and shall bring forth a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High... The Holy One who shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God (Lk 1:30,35)*.

Note: the Archangel said to Mary, *You shall call his name Jesus*, and adds three more qualifications: The **son of the Most High** ... The **Holy One** ... The **Son of God**.

The title **Holy One** is often used by the Old Testament Prophets to refer to Almighty God: *...I am the Lord, your Holy One, the creator of Israel, your King (Is 43:15)*. *I am God and not man, the Holy One present among you (Hosea 11:9)*. *I have not transgressed the commands of the Holy One (Job 6:10)*.

God is *Immanuel* – with us and in us

The prophet Isaiah wrote *A virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel (Is 7:14)*. Then, in his Gospel, Matthew goes on to interpret the name Emmanuel: *God with us (Mt 1:23)*. Jesus of Nazareth, a divine person living in the womb of His human Mother, then being born and living among us. That divine Person assumed that human nature from Mary and his divinity from God His Father. That is the foundation of our faith.

Was no mere surrogate mother – she was primarily a disciple

To understand Mary's role as a disciple it is useful to remember how every human being is a person created in the image and likeness of God, possessing divine grace and life. This means that we all have -- ingrained in our spiritual DNA- a fundamental orientation toward God our maker. We are born for perfection, to be holy as our creator is holy. It is thus God who gives our lives meaning and purpose.

When God revealed himself as Creator, he included in that title the idea of father, mother and master. As **Father**, God is the giver, pouring out his love for us so that we may be and exist. As **Master**, God shows us how to become his sons and daughters, setting out the only way to be and become what we were created to be. As **Mother** he gives life, nurturing us and caring for us so that our inner divinity is allowed to transform our every word and deed.

Mary's perennial "Yes" to God

This is the fundamental reason why we call Mary: a disciple of Christ. This is best illuminated in her response to the angel... *I am the servant of the Lord*. In this self-awareness, Mary understands herself to be a daughter of God, someone loved by God and called into his service. Someone she serves with every aspect of her being.

She reconfirms this through her **Yes** at the moment of the Annunciation. Through this **Yes** took up the vocation of a disciple. Through her **Yes** she proclaims that she is willing to act according to God's will, not her own. The Gospels illustrate her true character as she is shown to be someone to ponders much and speaks little as she seeks to discern the divine will.

The truth is – we need God

None of us can ever offer to God a life in perfect imitation of His Son. What Jesus does is open his Heart to us and invites us: **Learn from me**.... He calls to us, **Follow me**! Mary is our guide on that journey. She reminds us that we cannot do it by human effort. We need the power of the Spirit working in us, a power we call "grace". The heart of the Good News is that God's abundant and amazing grace has been given to baptized believers. *God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us*, to use Saint Paul's beautiful language in **Romans 5: 5**. It is ours. Now. Ours to use.

Without grace, the following of Christ is impossible, just as it was in Mary's life...*The almighty has done great things to me*....God takes the initiative. Grace triumphs over our frailty. God takes what is weak and makes it strong so that the divine saving works can continue and be victorious in us and through us.