

*Come down, O Love divine; seek thou this soul of mine,  
and visit it with thine own ardor, glowing. Amen.*

Did God need a mother?

God had a plan. God had a plan for reconciling his fallen creation to Himself. But He couldn't do it from the outside – he had to do it from the inside. He had to be one of those fallen creatures – and for that God needed a mother.

Now, Jesus could have just beamed into earth's atmosphere. Many would have preferred it that way – isn't nearly as messy as being born. But being born was part of the plan. Starting from scratch was part of the plan. If God was going to take on a human body, it was going to start from an egg. We don't ask too many questions about how that egg was fertilized – the angel Gabriel is vague on the details when Mary asks the logical questions – He just says: "*the power of the Most High will overshadow you.*"

And if God's plan was to involve the divine self becoming humanly embodied, it was going to involve bodies. Lots of them. God doesn't seem to have a problem with human bodies. God made human bodies, in all their intricate design and complex functioning. God made the reproductive system in all its power and weirdness. And though our sacred story suggests that God skipped one part of that system in bringing this embryo about, that is the only human function passed over in bringing the Son of God to earth.

This strange story at the heart of Christmas suggests that God loves the creation God made, even fallen and chaotic, and less than what God created it to be. God loves us, though we are broken and self-oriented and capable of inflicting unimaginable harm upon our fellow man and fellow creatures. God delights in the intricacy of all that God so brilliantly designed. Would it make sense for God to bypass all this creation in the name of redeeming it? No, we see that God so valued what God had made, even rebellious humanity, that God worked through this frail flesh to restore it to righteousness.

And so the Lord of Life entered into human flesh at its most basic level,  
and grew from an egg in a young woman's womb.  
That young woman endured cramps and mood swings and the joys of having  
something like a melon taking up room in your belly, sitting on your bladder –  
Mary got to experience it all, the happy kicks and Braxton-Hicks,  
hiccups and contractions – all of it to bear God in human flesh into the world.  
God coming into the world through her very human flesh.

And then Jesus got to experience it all – teething and toilet training, puberty and  
growth spurts, all a part of the experience of embodiedness, what the church  
calls Incarnation, *carne*, flesh – literally enfleshedness.  
Only so could he truly redeem this flesh He came to save: by living in it,  
fully knowing the human condition: the body – muscles and nervous system;  
but also the complexities of our emotions, the joy and rigor of our intellects,  
the uncontrollable urge of a laugh breaking out, the need to go off and weep.  
Jesus experienced hunger and feasting, giddy joy and unbearable pain.

And do we think that God is through using bodies to accomplish God's purposes?  
As we live out our embodied lives, we can only be useful to God in our bodies,  
through our bodies. Just as Mary's DNA was utterly unique, so is ours.  
No one else has a body like yours, a mind like yours, a personality like yours.  
These are God's instruments to bring God's love and peace to a world  
in desperate need of both.  
This world could only see Jesus once because a woman physically bore him into it.  
It can only see Him now as we show Him forth, as Christ's body.

You've heard the expression that we have to be the hands of Christ,  
the feet of Christ, the voice of Christ, the arms of Christ.  
It's true. God needs our bodies to be seen and heard in this world.  
God needs you. God needs me. Our whole selves, not just parts. All of us.

Last week I talked about how we share the mission of John the Baptist,  
to be bearers of light into the darkness, working for justice,  
preparing the way for Jesus, the coming Light of the World.  
We also share Mary's mission – to be bearers of Christ, to be pregnant  
with Christ-life, no matter our gender or age or circumstances.  
Like Mary, we are called to let Christ's life grow in us.  
And let's push this pregnancy metaphor a little further...

Just as a human embryo is the product of the union of two seeds, so this new life we bear is also the product of the union of two souls – ours and Christ's. Our claim is that in baptism, we are united with Christ; a new entity takes root, a life that grows and grows in us. It fills us, and is born in new ways every day.

Are you conscious that there is another life inside you, just as Mary was conscious as her pregnancy wore on? A life that feels full and important, and growing? Some women know right away that there's something different in their bodies; some are surprised to find out there's something new going on. That's how the life of faith can be for us – we can go along, doing our thing, only gradually becoming aware that something new is taking hold and growing. But once we're aware, we start to notice it more and more – that thing kicks! And moves around. And starts to take over your life, and grow in you.

I had a friend who began to have a recurring dream about a bark purse her grandmother had given her when she was a child. Her grandmother had been a missionary in Africa. Finally she asked her mother, "Where was grandma a missionary?" "In Uganda." And then Martha began seeing references to Uganda everywhere – on TV, in her readings, even in church. It was relentless. Talk about being overshadowed by the Holy Spirit. So she looked on our diocesan website and found out a nearby church had a mission to Uganda. She went to a meeting – turned out they had a mission trip planned two months from then. She went. She fell in love with the people and became captured by visions of how she could help. She ended up partnering with local dioceses there to manage two orphanages and got the Rotary Club in her town to fund a clean water project. So much life.

Fourteen years ago I looked at the parish list of my church in Connecticut and I realized the congregation was larger than our Sunday attendance. For various reasons, some good, a lot of people didn't make it to church each week. I wondered what would happen if I offered them some spiritual nourishment during the week, by email, so they could just take it in when they could, if they wanted. That idea grew and took shape in me until *Water Daily* was born: a spiritual reflection each weekday on the following Sunday's gospel reading. Now instead of one sermon a week, I gave people five. And what I hoped would happen did: people felt more connected to God and to church, and came more.

And that little baby has grown – gradually the email list grew to over 400 people on three continents, and then I started recording it, and then I added a podcast, and it is now posted on social media and played at Night Prayers. And I'm feeling the kick of another life – a weekly version for children. And another geared more for the unchurched or curious or disillusioned.

How about you? Are you feeling those inner nudges and urges, little kicks? Where are you being called to be a Christ bearer? What's the darkest place you know of? Are you called to bring Christ's light into it? Who's the most despairing person you know? The most cynical? Are you called to bear Christ's life to him? To her? Are you a bearer of Christ to your children, parents, your spouse, your co-workers?

Mary was invited to participate in God's plan in the most intimate way possible.

But in a very real way, what is asked of Mary is also asked of us:

To make ourselves available to God.

To make a space within ourselves for grace, a space available to God-life.

To listen when God calls, or kicks, or nudges, and step out in faith,

trusting that *"the one who calls you is faithful."*

When Mary says, "How?" Gabriel says, *"The Holy Spirit will come upon you."*

When God calls us, God gives us his Holy Spirit –that is a promise that never fails.

And whenever the Holy Spirit comes upon us, we bear fruit, we bear life.

My prayer for us, the Body of Christ here in Charles County and stretching around the world, is that we be given the grace to say "Yes, here I am, God!" to let go of our fears, our agendas, our plans; to allow God to overshadow us, to invite God to fill us with his Holy Spirit, that we might bear Christ into the world He lived and died to save.

We are having a baby!

*Amen.*

**Luke 1:26-38**

In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end." "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God." "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.