



**Advent Course Talks 2009**

**Written & Delivered by Peter Kane and Jon Robinson**

Session 3 – Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> December

**Welcome**

**Prayer**

Eternal God, you came to our world not in a blaze of publicity, surrounded by pomp and show, but quietly, unassumingly, almost unnoticed, in the quiet of the night in the little town of Bethlehem – born in a manger, to the Virgin Mary, your coming first witnessed by shepherds out working in the fields.

Time and again you have chosen the small, the humble, the seemingly insignificant, and have worked out your purposes through them. You have shown your strength in what the world counts weakness, you have made the last first, and the least the greatest.

Lord, teach us what that means today – that you can use us beyond our imagining, that you can take what seems unimportant and turn it into something wonderful, that you can work among us in ways that exceed our wildest expectations.

Teach us to see life not merely from our own perspective but from yours, and so may your strength be made perfect in our weakness.

In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

**Reading** - Luke 1:26-38

**Music** - 'Magnificat from the Gloucester Service (Herbert Howells)

**Talk**

1) We have heard from the reading the whole story of the initial origins of Jesus – He was from God, yet was born of a human – a true indication that Jesus was fully God and fully man.

Mary, the chosen mother of Christ was not some super star, popular local hero or known as a wealthy individual. She was a young lady, a girl perhaps. What makes her truly remarkable is the fact that she was chosen by God to be involved in one of the great moments in history – she was to be part of the great miracle that sets Jesus apart from the all other prophets, religious figures and prominent people from other religions.

God's favor for Mary did not automatically bring instant success or fame. His blessing on Mary, the honor of being the mother of the Messiah, would lead to much pain: her piers would ridicule her; her fiancée would come close to leaving her; her son would be rejected and murdered.

So what happened? Well, Mary was quite a normal person. She reacts, I am guessing, in a similar way to how we would behave when an Angel turns up – she was afraid! But she was certainly no fool. When the angel of the Lord informs her that the Holy Spirit has made her pregnant, she reacts by demonstrating her total grasp of the situation – she replies to the Angel, 'How can it be, since I am a virgin!'

2) So how do we know this was a genuine event? The birth of Jesus to a virgin is a miracle that many people find hard to believe. But there are three key points that help can help us with our belief and faith. Luke was a medical doctor, and he knew perfectly well how babies are made. It would have been just as hard for him to believe in a virgin birth as it is for us, and yet he reports it as fact! Luke was a painstaking researcher who based his gospel on eye witness accounts. Tradition holds that he talked with Mary about the events he recorded. This is Mary's story, not a fictional invention.



If we as Christians believe that God is all powerful, then there should be no problem with accepting the virgin conception at all!

So we have a reasoned and considered account in the Gospel of Luke – and account that shows that Mary became unique, that her motherhood was essential for the coming of Christ. Again we see that Jesus was truly special – even before his birth he was surrounded by true holiness and gifts from God the father.

3) The last section of today's talk is about Mary's final response to the Angel. She didn't shy away from the Angels message, even though it was so unusual, surprising and potentially disastrous for her immediate life. I think that Mary's final response to the angel tells us something about the nature of true faith - "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Mary says 'yes' to the Lord - she accepts the call of God to share in his redemptive work in the world and to allow his Son to be born in her by the power of the Holy Spirit. And furthermore, her response demonstrates something of the nature of true servant hood. For in accepting the call to be the mother of the Lord, Mary was effectively giving up her right to live independently of the call of God. There was no question of living her life according to her own rules or requirements.

Rather from now on she would be living her life wholly in obedience to God's will. And let's remember that her calling did not end with her giving birth to Jesus, but being the Lord's servant was to change the whole course of her life. When Mary made her response to the angel, she would only dimly have been aware of what she was to experience over the years as she saw her Son grow into manhood, to die a cruel death upon a cross, and also to experience the joy of his resurrection and the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost.

But that is what it means to be obedient to God's call - we simply don't know where it will lead.

God calls to serve Him today. Yet his call may not be predictable or easy.. When we seek to be obedient to God's will, who knows what we will end up doing. Obedience to God means nothing less than giving up our ambitions and putting ourselves wholly at God's disposal.

As you are aware, this is not a popular concept in the modern world. We place great value on personal and moral independence - we set our own agendas for living and if a given morality does not suit our tastes, then we tend to change it. But as Christians, we are called to be servants of the living God, to live our lives wholly in obedience to his will. This will often lead us, as it did Mary, through all kinds of suffering and trials, but through it all, God grants us the help of his Holy Spirit. We need to ask the Lord that he might fill each one of us with his holy and supreme grace so that in all things we may seek to do his holy and perfect will.

If sorrow weighs you down and dims your hope, think of Mary and wait patiently for God to finish working out his plan. Remember the mighty words written in the book of Jeremiah; I alone have a plan for you, declares the Lord. Plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the LORD

#### Discussion Time

- What does the doctrine of the Virginal Conception say to us about the nature of Jesus Christ? What significance does this have in a society in which there are many different faiths and ideologies?
- What does the calling of Mary say to us about the way in which God chooses individuals to share in his mission to the world?
- In what particular way/s might God be calling you to share in his mission?
- The familiar words of the Magnificat (v46-55) are traditionally heard at every service of Evensong. But in what ways do they pose a challenge to our world today?



- What does it mean for us, individually, to be obedient to God's holy and perfect will?

**Music** - 'I the Lord of Sea and Sky'

**Closing Prayer and the Grace**

God our Redeemer,  
who prepared the Blessed Virgin Mary  
to be the mother of your Son:  
grant that, as she looked for his coming as our saviour,  
so we may be ready to greet him  
when he comes again as our judge;  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever. Amen.