

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT Year B December 21, 2014

Theme: God and Woman

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This week seventeen year old, Pakistani, **Malala Yousafzai** gave her acceptance speech as recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo, Norway.

With amazing poise she noted that in addition to being the youngest person to receive the prize *“I am pretty certain that I am also the first recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize who still fights with her younger brothers. I want there to be peace everywhere, but my brothers and I are still working on that.”*

Malala went on to eloquently and movingly speak on the subject for which she has been persecuted, shot, nearly killed and driven from her beloved homeland – namely **the right to and education of girls and young women.**

At the end of her speech she asked on behalf of the children of the world:

“Why is it that countries which we call strong are so powerful in creating wars but are so weak in bringing peace? Why is it that giving guns is so easy but giving books is so hard? Why is it, why is it that making tanks is so easy, but building schools is so hard?”

Malala might stand as **an icon** for a similarly tough, determined, forceful young woman of justice whom we heard about in the Gospel of Luke today – one Mary of Nazareth.

Perhaps we do not think of Holy Mary in such terms because we are **so far removed from her world** that we do not comprehend what the story we heard represented for her or what it said about her.

We live in a time and place – at least in the west -- when we are beginning to **take women's rights and women's equality for granted**:

- we see women in powerful positions;
- we are used to women claiming equal rights next to men;
- we expect women to assert themselves when these rights are denied or trampled.

Not so in the time of Mary.

Women had few rights and were largely **subservient to men in a patriarchal society**: the father, the brothers, the husbands, the sons dominated the women.

Legally a woman was under the thumb of the man and was virtually his property; when the husband died all was inherited by the son.

Religiously the women could not even enter the main part of the synagogue but stayed behind a screen in the back.

Thus, the first **astounding part** of today's Gospel is that the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a young woman in the town of Nazareth.

Why was God **communicating with a woman**, probably a teenaged woman?

Why didn't God do it properly, as he did in **Matthew's Gospel**, by going to the man, Joseph? There the angel announced the birth of Jesus to Joseph in a dream.

And when she noted Mary was troubled by the greeting, the angel told her: **"You have found favor with God. You are to conceive and bear and son and you shall name him Jesus."**

A woman didn't **name a child** in the Jewish tradition: that was a man's job.

Then Mary asked her question: **"How can this be since I have no relations with a man?"**

How dare she broach this a subject with anyone but her husband?

And finally: **“Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.”**

This tough, determined, forceful young woman agrees to the outrageous proposition of the Lord without consulting, let alone gaining the approval of the men in her life -- either her father or her husband to be.

She doesn't even inform them.

Mary makes the momentous decision on her own, as woman who knows her own mind, her own faith, her own choice.

Astounding: God reached out to a young peasant woman from a tiny village in Galilee to be an intimate partner in ultimate revelation of divine love for us.

And Mary made a confident personal decision - **“let it be done be done to me according to your word”** – impacting not only her hopes and dreams and those of her intended husband but those of God and the world – to be that partner on her own.

With such a combination, how could the result not be Someone as magnificent, as awesome, as holy as Jesus, the Christ, the Son of the Most high.

Let us sing and shout for joy!

Let praise and honor Holy Mary, bold and confident woman!

Let us praise and worship the Father who chose such a woman to bring the Christ to us!

Sisters and brothers, let us celebrate the Feast of Christmas!