

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT (12/20-21/2008)

2 Samuel 7/1-8/16, Psalm 89, Romans 16/25-27, Luke 1/26-38

For the third time in two weeks, we are treated to the story of the angel's visit to Mary and her acquiescence to God's plan. (See also Dec. 8th, and Dec. 12th.)

And we're not through with it yet! Just wait and see.

Why does the Church insist on using this particular passage from *Luke* so often?

Aside from the fact that it makes sense liturgically, i.e., it fits with the theme of the particular Mass, the story of Mary's openness to the request of God is of cosmic importance.

Before this event which took place in the hill town of Nazareth, God was indeed profoundly and inextricably involved in His creation.

It had been ever so since the beginning - and even before the "beginning".

True worshippers of God - however they define "God" - have always believed the Divine is present in this world of ours.

Sometimes in the past, the presence of God - or the gods - was not always seen as a benign presence, but as somewhat hostile to the human condition and human needs.

After the event in today's Gospel passage, God's presence would be acknowledged as it, indeed, had always existed, that is, as beneficent, as creative, as caring and nurturing.

Mary's "yes" gave the world a divine presence all wrapped up in our human nature.

This child to be born of the Virgin was to be fully human to the marrow of his bones, like us in everything but sin alone.

And, at the same time, he was the second person of the Trinity, fully God "to the 'marrow' of his being".

How could that be, both God and a human being, two natures, in one person?

It goes counter to our intuition.

Surely God would be only "masquerading" in human form, hiding behind our mask as it were.

There are conscientious believers down through the centuries who have espoused this point of view, but the Church does not, nor do we.

As human as he was, having set aside his equality with God, Jesus took on our humanity, without condition, without restraint, without confusion.

That truth always blows my mind.

Why was this done for us?

On this tiny blue planet, so infinitesimal in the universe, why is this the only place (as far as we know at this point in history) where conscious life, the image of God, seems to flourish?

Do you ever wonder about that?

Do we have any understanding of God's plan, begun in Mary, conditioned on her "yes", resulting in the birth of a child in an out-of-the-way "third world country"?

No wonder the only proper response to the birth of Jesus is awe.

And maybe the only ones truly capable of such awe are children, the little ones, whom Jesus asks us to become like.

Christmas is a feast for the child in all of us.