

BEHOLD, YOU WILL CONCEIVE IN YOUR WOMB AND BEAR A SON - Biblical Commentary by F. Alberto Maggi OSM

Lk 1.26-38

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy— the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

Nothing is impossible to God. And with these words the episode of the annunciation of the angel Gabriel to Mary ends. Because nothing is impossible to God his word needs to be listened too, trust in this and then actions are needed. The evangelist closes with this assurance - that nothing is impossible to God -the episode of the annunciation is truly on the upward way.

St. Paul in the first letter to the Corinthians says that God chose that which is despised, that which is ignoble in the world, that which we would never have chosen for ourselves. God had done that.

Lets read Luke's gospel. "In the sixth month the angel Gabriel..." Gabriel in Hebrew means "the strength of God", therefore the strength of creation is able to overcome every resistance. "... was sent

from God to a city of Galilee..” and already the difficulties begin because the angel of God is not sent to the saintly region of Judea , that had the name of the founder of the 12 tribes of Israel , Judah, the place where dwelt God’s presence , in Jerusalem’s temple, but in a very despised region that in the book the prophet Isaiah, chapter 28, 23, indicates this place as “ the district of the gentiles “, the pagans and the unbelievers.

District in Hebrew is Ghelil, from which comes Galilee. So the region is despised, the region of the people that even had they believed could not be helped, therefore excluded from God’s works. And this city of Galilee is “.. *named Nazareth,*” never mentioned in the Old Testament, never mentioned in the Bible. A wild place where the people lived in caves, a warlike people.

Giuseppe Falvio, contemporary of the gospels, says that the Galileans are warlike from birth. But there is still more “..*to a virgin betrothed..”* We have difficulty in understanding the indications that the evangelist gives us, because matrimonial customs are distant and very different from ours. The matrimony was in two parts, the first part was called betrothal, when the girl was twelve years old and the boy eighteen years old, and after a year the second part of the matrimony - the marriage.

So, we have this girl that was in the first part of the matrimony, when they still did not live together and there was no relationship between them.

This woman is betrothed . Therefore, the angel is sent to the woman. God never spoke to a woman, so this also is uphill, the bible says that *from the woman sin began and because of this all will die.*

“..*betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary”* and here yet again another uphill run, from the many names that could have been chosen to give birth to Jesus the name chosen is one that the Bible held unfortunate. Why? It is the name of Moses’ sister. an ambitious woman, severely punished by God with leprosy. And from then on the name Mary never appears in the Bible.

The same as in our time the Christian name Judah, which is a beautiful name, also the name of an apostle (not only Jesus’ betrayer), but because one remembers the betrayal no one calls his child Judah.

And the name Mary for a child was not used because it reminds one of a woman punished by God. so Things are looking upward. In Galilee, at Nazareth, a woman with this name was unfortunate; “ *And he came to her and said, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!”*

God is not attracted by Mary’s merits, but fills her with his love. “..*the Lord is with you!”* they are the words with which God confirms his presence to those that are called to perform his works, as, for example Gideon. “*But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.”* So God has filled her with his love. “..*you will conceive in your womb and bear a son,..”* and here begins the novelty that will mature during Jesus’ life and teachings.

“.. and you shall call his name Jesus.” But this is unheard of, a woman cannot give a name to a child, but she must call him Jesus. The name of the child will be the same as that of the father, here the woman is called to break with the tradition, break away from the past and open up to the new.

.She must give the name to the child and not call him like his father, Joseph, as the tradition, she must call him Jesus, The angel says that this child *“ He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David,..”* he will not inherit the throne, but it is a new action. *“... and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”*

This is the promise that the angel makes to Mary. Well, Mary is not too put out in front of this novelty and simply asks *“And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”* Because the second part of the matrimony, the marriage, when living together begins, had not begun.

“And the angel answered her,.. “ the evangelist encloses Mary's existence between the two comings of the Holy Spirit, the annunciation and the Last supper at Pentecost. *“The Holy Spirit will come upon you,..”* in Mary there is a new creation, a new generation. *“...and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.”* A way of saying to understand the he that will be born will be the Messiah, messenger of God, liberator of the people.

So, the Holy Spirit comes to Mary as at the moment of the creation, that which is born is something completely new. Why does the angel exclude Joseph in all this? Because the father transmitted not only the biological life, but also the religious and morale traditions. Jesus will not follow the fathers of Israel, but will follow the Father, God.

The angel confirms: *“And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.”* The words that God had said to Sarah, she also was old, with Abraham who did not believe it possible to have a child, and the angel confirms to Mary, that nothing is impossible to God.

God's works with his creative force has no limits, but, as we remembered at the beginning, there is need on man's behalf to listen, to trust these words and then his collaboration. *“ And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord;”* not a servant. “Servant of God” was one of the titles that the population of Israel had, therefore Mary represented the people of Israel. *“...let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.”*

Mary trusts completely the God of her fathers, now the most difficult task awaits: to welcome and accept the son of her God, Jesus.