

Sometimes we call the Fourth Sunday in Advent Mary's Sunday. The reason is clear. In the Gospel this morning, we read the story of the Annunciation – the angel Gabriel telling Mary that she would conceive of the Holy Spirit and have a son. Each year, on the Fourth Sunday of Advent, we read one of the accounts of Mary's story. Each year we honor Mary as the most revered of women. From early in Christian history, theologians have referred to her as *theotokos*, Greek for "God-bearer." In the teaching of the Roman Catholic church, Mary is the "Mother of God," words that often make Protestants shutter. But when you look at the root of this title, you have to admit that it is not so far off the mark, after all. The point is that we honor Mary because she, of all people, had the privilege of giving birth to Jesus, whom we understand to be the Incarnate God.

There is much that can be said, regardless of how we deal with the question of the historicity of the virgin birth. The irrefutable teaching point of this story is that Mary, faced with a most difficult tasking, was perfect in obedience. Her obedience came from faith. Faith alone gave her the strength and courage to birth her child, to raise him with the same unconditional love that he, himself, later gave to all humanity. Faith alone gave her the courage to raise Jesus largely as a widow. Note that Joseph falls completely from the gospel picture after the infancy and early childhood narratives, while Mary does not. The logical assumption must be that Joseph had died, even though the Bible doesn't mention this. The measure of Mary's strength was her faith, and I am repeating this because it demands repeating. We have to understand that the core element of faith is not so much hope, as theologians often claim. Rather, the core element of faith is trust - trust in God. Faith is trust that God is love, and that God abides in a steadfast love that never ceases, and that in that love and through that love, all things are possible.

That perfect love, the very essence of God, called, in theology, the creating Word of God, or the *logos*, came into this world, in flesh, as the incarnate Son, Jesus. And the Word came through Mary. She gave God's Word birth. Mary gave God's Word life. So, we remember Mary on this fourth Sunday in Advent and honor her as our model of obedience in faith. As Mary was, so ought we to be: confident in God, confident of ourselves when we are obedient to God; confident, as we await our meeting with Jesus.
Amen.