



“Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.”

Perplexed by the words of the angel Gabriel, Mary ponders what sort of greeting this might be.

“Now you will conceive in your womb and bear a son. 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 holy and called the Son of God.” And so Mary took into her heart and pondered what she had seen and heard.

She took God into her body and housed for all of us the body of Christ.

She held the Spirit of God in her heart, not fearing, not running away, not trying to reason it out and understand it, but neither just affirming it and letting it alone, denying the reality of what was happening to her. She took it all and pondered it, looked at it, loved it and made a space for it, within herself. That’s what Advent is for, making a space for God within ourselves.

Mary is our Advent model: that part of us which receives the Word of God in openness and acceptance beyond reasoning. In faith. She knew human reasoning could not fathom the miracle that was happening, so she says, *Here I am*. Let it be so.

Let it be regardless of what the reaction of my neighbours will be.

Let it be regardless of what my boyfriend’s reaction will be.

Let it be, according to your word.

Her faith was greater than her understanding of the mystery. Her faith carried her through her growing boy’s rebuke in the Temple, his rather odd behaviour at a big wedding party, his slighting of her as an excuse for a metaphor in discipleship. Her faith carried her through that horrible day on Golgotha.

And she could have said no.

The Old Testament is full of Biblical heroes who thought too hard about what God was asking of them and made excuses and doubted; made excuses and tried to duck what God was asking. Only Isaiah stands out as someone else faced with a request by God and says, *Here I am Lord. Send me*.

At that moment, confronted with a messenger from God, Mary had no role model to fall back on, no precedent or conventional wisdom, no rules or regulations to follow. She was on her own, in virgin territory. The salvation of humanity was waiting for her consent, her choice to take a leap of faith and say, *Yes, here I am*.

She was a virgin, whole unto herself, unpenetrated by the concerns of conventional society and authority, heedless of the powers that be.

Mary took hold of and fully embraced God and in concert with him made a miracle.

As Mary protected the Saviour as he grew, so we promise to care for him wherever we go, whomever we meet.

As she carried Jesus within her, he would become her liberator and saviour.

So as we carry Jesus with us and nurture and preserve him through our faith, we also carry within us our liberator and salvation. As we carry him, so he leads us. The strength Jesus gives us, the vision Jesus gives us, the love Jesus gives us, the new birth Jesus gives us is sheltered and nurtured by us.

Immanuel. That’s a weird concept, this Immanuel. God is with you. I think we often take for granted the Jesus that we shelter and nurture, only bringing him out when **we** need some help.

Think of Mary. Mary pondering. When all was done and dusted, she had an ordinary little boy to take care of. She must have pondered, what’s so special about him? He cries and laughs like a normal boy. He gets dirty and misbehaves like an ordinary boy. What’s this all about?

Maybe our faith can sometimes wander off into this kind of thinking, taking Jesus for granted. What’s so special about him? This faith business is too mysterious. It’s too costly. It’s too painful. It can cause us to be disconnected from the mainstream.

Faith requires perseverance, pondering, hurting, confusion, incomprehension, doubt, mystery. Obedience. Following.

This Christmas we can become willing wombs, partners in the creation of Christmas, offering Jesus a place of safety and nourishment and love, accepting him with joy and gladness and thanksgiving.

Christmas is when we ponder the Jesus within us and say:

Here I am Lord. I am your servant; all I have is for Jesus and the love he brings to this world.

Let it be according to your word.