

Homily for the 4th Sunday of Advent,
Dec. 20-21, 2008 “B”

Soon after the decree of Constantine in 312 A.D., Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. About that time a man names Arius, from the Egyptian city of Alexandria, began to travel through the Eastern part of the Roman Empire, preaching about Christ.

He understood that many of the former pagans were having difficulty grasping the Christian religion. He was sympathetic with them.

How could God, actually have become a human being? Arius tried to make the religion easier for them to accept, so he preached that God did not actually become human, God’s spirit overshadowed the man Jesus, and dwelt in the man Jesus, but Jesus, himself, though the greatest of all God’s creatures, was still a creature of God.

This was the beginning of the Arian Heresy. It held close to 90% of the Christian people for more than a century. The Nicene Creed, which we pray together each Sunday, was written to counter the beliefs of the Arians, and affirm the truth of Jesus’ divinity.

That the human and the Divine exist comfortably together in Jesus Christ is an astounding truth, yet, from the beginning of the Christian age people have had difficulty accepting and believing it. Most of the heresies in the Christian world have stemmed from the inability or the refusal to believe that God could consider mere humans so valuable and loveable.

However, God's choice to take on human flesh proclaims that he not only desires us to share his divinity, but He has given us the means to share it.

We cannot forget that it is in and through the human person (in and through us) God has chosen to reveal himself and enter our day to day living. God has bestowed on a lump of clay a gift of dignity, which far outshines the stars.

It is amazing to consider that so great and powerful a God, the master and the creator of all the worlds and the author of the deepest wisdom chose to come among us as a tiny child, dependant on the fragile care of human love.

In this action, God has given humanity a portion of his glory, and a place beside him in eternity. We can only draw two conclusions from this act of God, either our God is a no account, tawdry God or the dignity that we have been given is astounding.

Have you ever asked, "What do I want to become, and how should I live?" The fact that we can even ask that question betrays the reality of God's spirit deep within us. We have a desire to be more. Somehow we know that we were made for more. And it is true. God has given us a divine inheritance. If God's spirit were not within us, we could not dream or wonder about possibilities.

Today's Gospel affirms the wonder of almighty God's fascination with His people and His passionate love for the human person.

And to such a person, who was just barely a woman, really just a girl, the almighty God presented a possibility. He asked her, "Will you be a partner with me in the work of salvation? Will you work with me to open the eyes of

your brothers and sisters to the dignity and the glory I have called them to?”

The Angel delivered the Word of God to Mary. And that young girl had to decide. She had to make a choice to either live the reality of her dreams and visions of the future, or sit back and do no more than dream.

Is that extraordinary? Is that event too far fetched to be real? Not at all; as a matter of fact each one of us is presented with the same choice, we are asked to trust just as much and have just as much courage. Mary was only the first to believe and accept the power of Gods word, Jesus Christ, to transform and dignify her life.

Mary was given the opportunity to cooperate in the future shape of the world. Divine inheritance was offered to her, but she had to choose it. It is a little frightening to think that the salvation of the world was balanced on the thin thread of a teenage peasant girl’s choice.

But it is just as true with us today. Salvation relies just as much on what we will decide, what we will do with our lives. God chose to make us an important part of his plan.

God has given you the freedom to choose possibilities. He has given you the power and the potential to make a difference in the world. Not only that, God pleads with us to believe and trust that even one single person can make a profound difference.

Mary's trust in the Lord should give us courage. Her “Yes” to God made a difference. She is called the Mother of the Church because her trust and courage have inspired others to trust and be courageous with their lives.

You who are 14, or 19, or 40 or 80, God is fascinated and anxious for the possibility that you will accept his plan

to make of you a powerful agent of a better future. The challenge is to set aside fear and selfishness so that we can live as a human being was meant to live, as reflections of God's glory.

For many people the possibilities for their lives have faded, and the dreams have gone stale. Fear keeps us from being agents of Christ's plan for the future. But he says to us, as he said to Mary, **Fear not.**

The time for fear has come to an end. Now is the time to answer God's call. The Mother of all faith and all trust, the Mother of God, our sister Mary stands as a reminder of the gift which God holds out to his beloved people.

Take time to ask yourself, no matter how old you are, what you want to become. Ask yourself what are your dreams and hopes. And this Christmas season, in God's grace and love, take at least one step to turn that dream into a reality.