



Fourth Sunday of Advent

2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-12, 14, 16;

Psalm 89;

Romans 16:25-27;

Luke 1:26-38

Here I am!

Coming to her,
the angel said, "Hail,
full of grace! The Lord is with you".

But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call him Jesus. [...] Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" And the angel said to her in reply, "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. [...] Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

At the time the angel visited Mary in her home, it had been six months since her cousin Elizabeth had conceived. Why does the Gospel give us such a detailed account of that visit and of the events to come? Not for historical accuracy but to help us understand that this is a true story and, above all, to tell us that Mary was aware of her situation; she knew what was going on around her; she knew that she was Joseph's bride-to-be and, like a true woman of faith, she sought to understand the meaning of what was taking place, humanly speaking. She was astonished to hear what lay in store for her, marveling at the stupendous prospect of the Incarnation. But, in contrast to her cousin Zechariah, she did not ask for proof; she did not demand guarantees; she trusted, without forgetting her reality, namely, that she "did not know man." But by means of her "here I am," she placed herself in the hands of God.

The visit ends with a summary of what is happening (Elizabeth, an elderly woman, is already in her sixth month of pregnancy); it highlights the power of the Creator (nothing is impossible to God) and everyone's amazement (because Elizabeth was known to be barren). "Ever since the creation of the world, God's invisible attributes of eternal power and divinity have been able to be understood and perceived in what he has made" (Rm. 1:20) by means of a continual integration of intelligence and trust, given that "the obedience of faith is to be given to God who reveals—an obedience by which a person commits him/herself entirely and freely to God, offering the full submission of intellect and will to him and freely assenting to the truth revealed by him" (DV 5).

Let us draw near to Mary, aware of our situation, trusting in the omnipotent goodness of God, so as to discover his great plans for us and remain amazed at his closeness.

Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women.

Whenever we look to Mary, we come to believe once again in the revolutionary nature of love and tenderness. In her we see that humility and tenderness are not virtues of the weak but of the strong, who need not treat others poorly in order to feel important themselves. Contemplating Mary, we discover that she who praised God for "bringing down the mighty from their thrones" and "sending the rich away empty" (Lk. 1:52, 53) is also the one who brings a homely warmth to our pursuit of justice (EG 288).

