

Read

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

Psalm 89:2-3, 4-5,
27, 29

Romans 16:25-27

Luke 1:26-38

LIVING THE WORD

Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 20, 2020



REFLECTION

It is difficult to even imagine Mary's response to the angel Gabriel in today's Gospel. Instead of becoming angry or frustrated or even scared, Mary responds with only one question. Mary's relationship with God is so strong that her question is not one of doubt, even though doubt would be a completely normal response! Instead, placing her complete trust in God, Mary asks Gabriel for some clarification. Very simply stated, Mary says, "Help me understand." Think about your own life. Next time you are presented with a difficult situation, remember today's Gospel and the woman of faith who responds to the working of God in her life. Take a deep breath and ask God to help you understand.



ACTION

Jean Vanier was the founder of L'Arche, an international network of communities for people of all abilities. He believed that all people have value and worth, no matter their intellectual or physical abilities. We all contribute to this one human society and must strive to foster one another's gifts. Before we can truly love others and honestly reveal their gifts and value, however, we must have knowledge of ourselves. So often, we can be quick to judge others but have trouble truly seeing ourselves as we are. Because Mary knew herself as God knew her, she was unafraid to move forward with a resounding "yes" to loving others. Do some research about Jean Vanier and L'Arche. Are there any L'Arche communities near you? Schedule a visit to learn more about this incredible model of community.



<https://www.larcheusa.org/>

? QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ What keeps you from placing your complete trust in God?
- ❖ How as this season of Advent helped prepare you to celebrate the Incarnation at Christmas?



December 20, 2020

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

LECTIONARY #11B

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

Psalm 89:2-3, 4-5, 27, 29

Romans 16:25-27

Luke 1:26-38

Prepare for the Word

The following elements may be used by the catechist, teacher, or youth minister to prepare to facilitate today's session with teens. You may integrate this information into the reflection and discussion on today's readings.

Leader's Context

From the most ancient days, God's people knew God planned to save his people from their sin. They did not know the day or hour of their salvation, but they knew that God keeps promises. God's promise was kept when he sent the angel Gabriel to the Blessed Virgin Mary, asking her to be the mother of his Son. Her assent to God's request changed the world. Mary chose to do God's will and to cooperate with the Father. She chose grace and goodness over a simpler, easier path. We too are called to cooperate with God and with his grace in difficult situations in our lives.

Q FOCUS: *We know that God will be with us, even when we face the unknown.*

Liturgical Calendar Connection

Christmas is almost here, but Advent still lasts for another four days, until Thursday evening when we will celebrate the vigil Mass for Christmas. During this week, it is easy to be swept up into last minute Christmas preparations—shopping, decorating, traveling, and visiting with family and friends. However, we are still waiting and preparing our hearts to receive Christ. It is not Christmas yet (that receives its own season, more than just one day!). Spend some time every day this week in prayer as you consider the anticipation Mary and Joseph must have felt as they waited for Jesus' birth—not just as their

child but also as the promised Messiah who would save the world from its sin.

Church Teaching Connection

"Christ is the only way to the Father (cf. [John] 14:4-11), and the ultimate example to whom the disciple must conform his own conduct (cf. [John] 13:15), to the extent of sharing Christ's sentiments (cf. [Philippians] 2:5), living His life and possessing His Spirit (cf. [Galatians] 2 20; [Romans] 8:10-11). The Church has always taught this and nothing in pastoral activity should obscure this doctrine. But the Church, taught by the Holy Spirit and benefiting from centuries of experience, recognizes that devotion to the Blessed Virgin, subordinated to worship of the divine Savior and in connection with it, also has a great pastoral effectiveness and constitutes a force for renewing Christian living. . . . The Virgin's maternal intercession, her exemplary holiness and the divine grace which is in her become for the human race a reason for divine hope" (*Marialis cultus*, 57).

Hear the Word

Use this resource, a Lectionary, or a Bible to proclaim the reading. The book should be held reverently or placed on a lectern. If possible, light a candle that is placed near where the Gospel will be proclaimed. Gesture for teens to stand.

Gospel Acclamation

Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish or at school Masses. Teens may help with music and proclaim the Gospel.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Luke 1:26-38

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

All make the Sign of the Cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.

The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a

man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he 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 name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." But 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. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for 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.

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone may be seated.

Reflect on the Word

When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, first refer to the handout for today. Ask teens what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask teens about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:

Although the world didn't yet know it, the course of humanity shifted when a humble, teenaged Israelite girl encountered a messenger of God and cooperated with God and his grace. Mary was uniquely able to assent to God's will; conceived without sin, she was filled with grace. Even though she is fully human, she did not have the same likelihood toward sin that we have because God set her apart as one who did not have the stain of original sin. Even though God

had prepared Mary spiritually for this task, she still had to consider the practical reality of accepting the angel's message.

► **What challenges might Mary have experienced as a young, pregnant, unmarried woman?**

► **How do you think her spiritual preparation helped her say "yes" to God?**

Mary bravely said "yes" when the angel Gabriel asked her to be the mother of God. She would have known well the punishments for unmarried pregnant women in her region, but still accepted God's work in her life. She knew that God was with her in everything, even when she herself did not know what the future would hold. Being an unmarried, pregnant woman was not what she had planned for her life (after all, she was engaged to Joseph). Nevertheless, she faced this unknown with the assurance that God would be with her and she was in his service. Mary's inclination and eagerness to participate with God's plan changed the world; her "yes" brought forth the salvation our Lord freely gave to us. She responded with curiosity, wonder, joy, and assent.

► **Have you ever been in a situation where you knew that doing the right and good thing would be difficult? What was your response?**

► **How do we respond to that which God requests of us?**

The Blessed Virgin Mary is a beautiful example of someone who bravely faces life, choosing what is right and good, even under tremendously unusual circumstances. Mary knows and understands our lives, and her understanding is uniquely compassionate. We learn from Mary that when we cooperate with God, great things can happen.

Wrapping It Up

Consider these points to conclude the discussion and reflection. Integrate the thoughts and ideas that surfaced during the discussion as well as the "Church Teaching Connection" on page 88.

The world is transformed when people choose to do what is right and trust in God's Word.

Mary chose to cooperate with God even at risk to her own well-being.

We are called to do what is right and good, even when worried or afraid.

Act on the Word

Learning Discernment

Before beginning this activity, you will need to prepare several scenarios that the young people will discuss, as described below. You will also need paper and pens.

This activity is about situation discernment. It challenges the teens to remove themselves from the immediacy of certain situations to evaluate the morality of possible responses.

Before meeting with the young people, the leader should gather a few examples of difficult situations teenagers may face. Suggested situations are as follows; adapt the list as best suits your group.

- ✧ Cheating on tests
- ✧ Excluding others
- ✧ Alcohol and drug use
- ✧ Stealing
- ✧ Dishonesty with parents and teachers
- ✧ Undocumented immigration
- ✧ Helping a friend who is unexpectedly pregnant

Check the news for other examples that may be at the top of the teens' minds.

Divide the young people into small groups of three or four people. Prepare them to discuss these situations by sharing with them the following, or a similar summary of the decision-making process and Catholic teaching: Choosing what is moral and just is not always easy to do, even when the answer is clear. Having the fortitude to act with justice is a virtue that

we develop throughout our life. The more we practice making good decisions and listening to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the easier it becomes to make good decisions when faced with difficult situations.

Present each group with a different situation. List the following points on the board or a sheet of paper to help guide their discussions. As the groups are discussing, go around and chat with each group, lending another perspective to their conversation.

- ✧ Identify the problem.
- ✧ List several possible solutions for the problem; for discussion purposes, include solutions that are not morally sound, but make sure Catholic moral theology is clearly explained.
- ✧ Examine the repercussions of the healthy and unhealthy solutions.
- ✧ Evaluate how to make the best decision. Consider how they would help someone in a similar situation to make this decision. Also, consider how emotional responses factor into the decision-making process.
- ✧ Reflect on how bravery, faith, and careful discernment play a role in making a decision that cooperates with God's grace.

Have the teens share their group reflections with the larger group.

Closing Prayer

Lord God,
give us Mary's faith, that we may believe in
your promise.
Give us Mary's hope, that we may look to the
future without fear.
Give us Mary's love, that we too may bring forth
Christ by the love and kindness we show
to others.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

For Next Sunday

To help teens prepare for next Sunday's Mass, print, email, or share on a blog or social media the handout found on the next page. The JPG and PDF files are available at www.ltp.org/lwgr. Encourage teens to attend Mass with family or friends.