

Word for Sunday

By Father Albert Shamon

Mary Casts A Spell Of Joy

(This article draws from the readings of the First Sunday of Advent — Dec. 3 — and the Feast of the Immaculate Conception — Dec. 8).

Four people dominate the Advent Liturgy: Isaiah, John the Baptist, David, and Mary.



Fr. Shamon

It is Mary who casts a spell of joy over the Advent Season. With her acceptance of Gabriel's words at the Annunciation the long time of Israel's waiting is finished. The heavens are rent and He is come down.

Mary is the climax of a double movement begun in the Garden of Eden. No sooner had the woman fallen for the serpent's suggestion and the man for the woman's than God promised another Man and Woman to undo the evil done. "I will put enmity between you and the woman..."

The rest of the story of salvation history is the story of the preparation of that Woman. From the moment of that promise, history became the battleground of two contrary movements.

The first movement consisted in the purification of God's people from sin. God would have His son born in a sinless environment.

At first the flood of sin held sway. Chapters 3 to 11 of Genesis show sin overwhelming mankind. Like one in quicksand, mankind was hopelessly trapped. To break the grip of sin, man needed outside help. In Chapter 12, that help came when God called Abraham. With that call, the flood of sin is stemmed and the purification of a chosen race begins. God's intervention became more and more effective as the centuries rolled on — but in an ever-narrowing circle

of people and in an ever-increasing spiritual order. After the Assyrian and Babylonian Captivities, God's grace became progressively centered in a poor and humble elite (the remnant of the prophets, the *anawim*). It finally focused on two persons: Anne and Joachim. Alone, of all Old Testament personages, they enjoy the New Testament title of "Saint," as if to point out that in them the purification of the chosen people had reached its perfection.

Still, one step more remained in this purificatory process: it was for a person to come who was not only purified from sin, but preserved from all sin. This final stage was achieved in the Woman, foretold in Genesis, in her Immaculate Conception. "Rejoice, O highly favored daughter! The Lord is with you..."

The second movement consisted in the preparation of a people of faith. God desired that His Son be born not only in a sinless environment, but also in one of love. God wanted His Son to be ardently desired and freely accepted. A lack of faith had caused the loss of paradise. An act of faith was needed to regain it. This movement of faith also began with Abraham. He was asked to believe a sterile womb could conceive. He did, and became the father of the faithful. Israel's faith reached its apogee when the Woman of Genesis was asked to make a far greater act of faith, namely, to believe that a virginal womb could conceive.

Mary's destiny began by a totally free action on the part of God, her Immaculate Conception; it climaxed in a totally free act of faith on her part: her "be it done to me according to thy word." During this Advent Season, this double movement should find fulfillment in our lives: purification from sin by an ever-more devout and frequent use of the Sacrament of Reconciliation; and a deepening of faith by an ever-more conscious and active participation in the Most Holy Eucharist.

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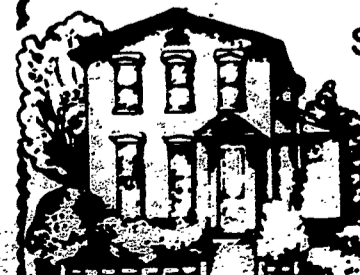
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