

Fourth Sunday of Advent



The hope and peace of our Lord awaits us as we approach the fourth and final Sunday of Advent, which also happens to be Christmas Eve this year. While it's an opportunity to rejoice in the birth of Jesus, Christmas can also be an unusually difficult time for those in recovery. Cultural expectations, heightened family tension, or a general sense of loss and loneliness may impact our attitudes and behaviors this time of year.

We have a chance to reflect upon the willingness of the Blessed Virgin Mary as we hear from the Gospel of Luke this Sunday. Mary's "yes" paved the way for Christ's entry into our world, revealing God's ultimate love for us and salvation from bondage. Prior to her invitation and call to take on such great responsibility, the angel Gabriel identified the presence of God within her:

*"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."*

Like most of us might when confronted with the magnificence of God's plan, Mary questioned how this could possibly be true. Similar to what we find along the pathway of recovery, the angel promised Mary that she will be supported by others along the way. In fact, her cousin, Elizabeth, has also had a miraculous spiritual experience, proving that nothing is impossible for God.

The Lord did not march into the world in a display of power and might, as many were expecting of their messiah. Rather, he was welcomed into the world by the grace of a humble woman:

*Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord.
May it be done to me according to your word."*

Reflection Questions

When faced with this amazing proposition, our Lord's Mother responded with the peace and serenity that comes with being protected by God. As we stay active in our recovery from addictions, compulsions, and unhealthy attachments, we will be faced with moments when we are asked to bring the hope of new life to others. This may not be convenient, nor may we feel prepared, but God will provide us support and grace along the way. When necessary, He will send angels to remind us of our true identity as beloved sons and daughters of God.

Let us always be willing to align with Mary as we proclaim, "May it be done to me according to Your word." The more we offer ourselves to the process of recovery, the more our lives will be filled with joy, love, and purpose. When our recovery is overlapped with the sacramental life of our faith, we get to know Jesus in an intimate and personal way.

We may be inclined to share glad tidings with those we encounter in the coming days as we anticipate the hope, joy, and love that comes from the birth of Jesus. We have been offered a priceless gift of peace and freedom and we rejoice in the opportunity to share it with others. May the freedom we find in recovery meetings allow us to be a beneficial presence to our families and communities this Christmas!

- What helps you know that you are loved and protected by God?
- How does the life and model of Mary influence your recovery and faith?
- How are you preparing to welcome new life this Christmas? What challenges are you facing while doing so?

Christmas Marathon Meeting

Join the CIR community for a Christmas Marathon Meeting and be of service by committing an hour of your time

- Marathon begins at 5p ET/2p PT Sunday, December 24 and concludes at 10p ET/7p PT Monday, December 25
- We're seeking volunteers to commit for an hour or more
- Commit here: tinyurl.com/cir-christmas-marathon-2023
- Invite a friend or others from your CIR meeting to join!
- Drop in any time day or night via phone or Zoom:
 - Zoom Meeting ID: 841 9988 9323
 - Passcode: 121212 | Dial in: (669) 900-6833

Sunday Mass Readings this Week

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

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

Second Reading: Romans 16:25-27

Gospel: Luke 1:26-38