

**“BUT...how can this be? ... Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord.”**

*In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.*

**Once upon a time**, a young girl was tapped on the shoulder, so to speak, and told by an angel that she would give birth to the Son of God. No wonder her first reply was, “**BUT**—how can this (possibly) be?”

We all know the rest of the story: the angel was Gabriel, the girl was Mary, the baby, her son, was Jesus, and, just as the angel had said... her baby was the Son of God.

We enjoy 2,000 years of hindsight. Today, we, yet, ponder and marvel at the theology involved. **BUT**, I wonder if we appreciate the psychology involved, in particular, from Mary’s perspective.

In all the beauty of this and its related narratives, I think what may be lost or overlooked **is the tremendous pain and suffering** Mary endured, both physically and mentally, since the first moment that angel appeared to her.

Obviously, late in her third term, she bounced along, for days, on dirt roads, atop a donkey, only to be turned away at an inn, hours before being forced to give birth in a filthy, part-cave, part-barn structure ...no doubt surrounded with the ‘aroma’ of... manure. Apparently, Joseph was the midwife! Unless, of course, you think an angel was dispatched to ‘cut the cord.’ No mention of such gory details in scripture. Imagine, at this point, Mary’s physical and psychological state!

Of course, there was that swarm of angels, that batch of shepherds, and, before long, those three, mysterious men from the East, bearing magnificent gifts. Perhaps that was the ‘lull’ before the storm because, shortly thereafter, another angel appeared and, with the newborn clinging to her, Mary and Joseph were told to **run for their lives** from Herod into Egypt... which they did.

Eventually, an angel appeared again & told them to return. It’s unknown what all happened next, but a decade or so later, the Christ-child, now on the brink of adolescence, got ‘lost’ with the elders in the Temple and, when eventually found, told Mary, in so many words, that he had to **‘do his thing,’** you know, **“be about his father’s business.”** Didn’t she **KNOW** that? In fact, she **didn’t!** Otherwise, she wouldn’t have been so upset, so... worried to death.

Then, once her crazy nephew, John (the Baptist), pointed a boney finger at him and declared HER ‘Jesus’ to be THE ‘Lamb of God,’ everything really broke loose. The scribes and Pharisees hated him and many others were out to get him --for challenging the normal order of things. He just wasn’t **‘Politically Correct’** for the times! He was rocking the boat too much, what with the Romans’ iron grip and known lack of tolerance for disorder or upheaval.

In the midst of all this turmoil, venom, & misunderstanding that surrounded her son —there was our dear Mary, the girl to whom that angel had appeared so many years before. She didn’t understand then; she didn’t understand now. All she knew was that she loved her son and her God, one and the same! How could she possibly, psychologically, grasp that theology--in the middle of the very storm that raged so fiercely 2,000 years ago? And, in some corners of the globe, rages on today—just tell a member of Isis you believe in Jesus. See what happens to you, **today!**

And here we are, this morning/evening, at the beginning of a workweek, just a few weeks before Christmas, to honor her memory, especially under the title of '**Immaculate.**' Yes, we believe with the eyes of faith, that our dear Mary was conceived in her mother, St. Ann's womb, without the effects of Original Sin. It was simply a part of God's eternal plan. Mary would be perfectly 'pure' from the moment of her own conception, not even touched by Adam's sin!

I emphasize that it was all a part of God's plan –not Mary's. I doubt if she ever understood God's plan. In your mind's eye, imagine her at the 13<sup>th</sup> Station, the Pieta. They dump her baby's mutilated, blood-drenched-body in her arms and say, in effect:

**"Thanks Mary. Here's your kid back. He did a really good job.  
Indeed ... 'it is finished!' "**

Do we dare to think **THAT** was Mary's plan? Of course not! The only plan Mary ever had –from the day that first angel appeared to her-- was simply to 'go along' with whatever God wanted... no matter where it took her or what it would cost her...she'd be the '**handmaid of the Lord!**'

She stuck to that simple plan. She ne-ver waivered! She never complained! She is the noblest person we could ever meet –besides Christ, Himself!

So, we honor her. And we should mimic her, echo her. Like Mary, we, most often, do not understand God's plan for us, either. Frequently, it doesn't make any sense. Life takes so many unexpected twists and turns: people lie. Friends betray, and then, evaporate. Promises are broken. Destinies collide. We even manage to disappoint ourselves. Turmoil and confusion invade our sense of sanity. Responsibility, often totally unfair, overwhelms us!

To all this, I say:

**"Do not be disheartened. Be like Mary –our mother... a model for the ages!"**

Neither did she understand the things that encompassed her life. Yet, in spite of it all, she saw herself as the servant, **"the handmaid of the Lord."**

It's a simple plan for every one of us:

What ever it takes;

What ever it costs;

Wherever it leads...

we should struggle to '**do the will of the Lord**'...as we perceive it,  
whether we underSTAND it... or not!

Can we hope to do any better?

Can we hope to be any better?

Can we hope to deserve any better?

**After all, either we believe we have an immortal soul or not and that...  
THIS life is a stepping-stone, a doorway, a threshold... to the next.  
In a split, nano-second, this will be gone ...and a-a-all eternity... will dawn!  
It's JUST.... THAT simple.**

May Almighty God, our Abba, bless you, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.