

When I was thinking about this sermon I thought about some of the Mary services I've been to here over the years. Last year at the end of the Mary advent services I took a bunch of poems home. They were reflections on Mary from a book by Nicola Slee called 'The book of Mary'. While I was preparing for this I dug them out and came across a poem called Beatitude. I think it's beautiful so I wanted to share it.

Beatitude

Blessed is she who consents to the Word

Blessed is she who dares

Blessed is she who bears the Word

Blessed is she who believes

Blessed is she who kindles the Word

Blessed is she who inspires

Blessed is she who sets free the Word

Blessed is she who empowers

Blessed is she who enfleshes the Word

Blessed is she who embodies God

The 3 things that stood out to me from this poem and our reading this morning were, Mary Consented to God, she bore God and she enfleshed or embodied God. I was reflecting on those 3 things and had some thoughts to share with you, if that's ok.

Blessed is she who consents to the word.

In my job at urban hope, we talk a lot to young people about consent. It's this issue that in theory is quite straightforward, but for young people, particularly in a society that gives massively confusing messages about sex and relationships, in practice can be very confusing.

With our hopefuls we talk about consent being active and enthusiastic. When I read Mary's conversation with Gabriel that is what I saw. "*I am the Lord's servant,*" Mary answered. "*May your word to me be fulfilled.*"

Mary asked no more questions, there was no sign of doubt. She says yes and the angel left. I think if she had needed more from God, he would have given it. She gives her consent in a moment, confidently.

I think Mary's consent reminds us that we have to say yes to God.

Last week in dreams we talked about the idea of 'Turning to Christ', which is used in the baptism liturgy.

We talked about making a conscious decision to turn towards light, to walk towards wherever we saw the fruits of the spirit. Knowing that as we move towards Love and Joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control we move towards God.

We were looking to give an active and enthusiastic YES to God, and his work in the world.

The Holy Spirit is now upon us all. We all are invited to participate in the story.

All it takes is a yes.

But let's also remember that this yes isn't trouble free. Consenting to anything means risking something, giving up some control.

Mary, when she said yes to the angel couldn't have known how it would have all played out. We never know exactly how our partnership with God will work out.

Consent to God is submission. We might not end up walking the road we expected.

We say yes to God in the knowledge that his way may not be the easiest. Un-wed mother, travelling heavily pregnant to Bethlehem, to have a baby in an inn's stable, and then having to do a runner in the middle of the night to another country isn't exactly the road well travelled or a walk in the park

But it is the road towards wholeness, peace and wisdom for each one of us and the world.

Blessed is she who consents to the Word
Blessed is she who dares

Blessed is she who bears the Word

Mary bore God. Mary's body was given over to the carrying of this baby, and her life would always include her devotion to him.

When we consent to God, we are agreeing to not longer being entirely our own. We consent to give our flesh, our earthly life to the light and life we carry within us. We are to devote our existence to it.

I have been so privileged be able to be around so many families at their different stages here at St Stephen's. It is one of the wonderful things about being part of a church that is diverse. Thanks so much for sharing your families with me- I learn so much from you.

From the parents here I have learnt what devotion looks like- I have seen that the bearing of a child doesn't stop once the child is born.

It re-orientates a parent's entire existence. I know that the parents here carry their children all the time. I see that they are devoted to them.

I can't imagine Mary's life was the same after Jesus was born. She had other children and did ordinary day-to-day things, but she would never have been able to stop carrying that piece of God. Her whole existence would have changed from the point she said yes.

We are to bare God. He invites us to allow his spirit to re-orientate our entire existence. We are to do our lives, the ordinary day-to-day stuff; with devotion to the One we carry within our hearts.

Blessed is she who bears the Word
Blessed is she who believes

Blessed is she who enfleshes the Word

Mary didn't just bare God, she spoke God, she acted God, and she put flesh on God.

When Elizabeth meets Mary in her house, there is this moment when the secret sacred is recognised and blessed by Elizabeth and this song telling who God is pours out of Mary.

In that song we hear God, we hear that He is wonderful, Just, Faithful and mighty.

In that moment Mary is our window to God. At this point of the story it is her and Elizabeth who enable us to understand who God is and the magnitude of what He has done.

We don't bare God for ourselves, we bare God so that we can embody him. We become windows in which to see God through. We are cloudy and broken, but windows nonetheless.

When I watch a parent devote themselves to their child, I see God embodied. When I hear you stand for justice, when I am blessed by you, when I am comforted by you, when I am rejoicing with you... There God is embodied to me. I see him- and I hope that I embody God to you and that together we embody God to our community, to our world.

We who have had our lives re-orientated by the Holy Spirit embody Christ. Mary was doing it as she sang, and as she loved this baby and as she lived, and we are to do the same.

Blessed is she who enfleshes the Word
Blessed is she who embodies God

I think for us today the challenge is to be daring like Mary, brave enough to say Yes. Brave enough to devote ourselves to a God that might disrupt our plans but who in exchange gives us himself and makes beauty of us. Brave enough to trust that as we speak and act and move, we bring God with us, and that through us God is changing the course of history.

May we all be like Mary.

Amen.