



## FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT, CYCLE B

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*Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Luke 1:37*

The Fourth Sunday of Advent every year is reserved for our awe-inspiring Mary, Mother of God, *Theotokos* ("God Bearer"). This year's Gospel leads up to the triumphant closing verse where Mary, in an act of free will, in totality, gives to God her very existence through her "Fiat – Yes!", "May it be done to me according to your word."

Through this inspiring proclamation our hearts are drawn to an extraordinary measure of devotion for God's Mother. This special devotion, reserved for Mary, is "Hyperdulia," Veneration and devotion given to the Virgin Mary as the most exalted of mere creatures.

While hyperdulia is substantially less than adoration, which is due to God alone, it is a singular devotion reserved for Mary. It is higher than "dulia – veneration – devotion:" reserved for our angels and saints.

As the Church came to understand this veneration of Mary, it is to be closely associated but subordinated to that of her Son. "The various forms of piety towards the Mother of God, which the Church has approved within the limits of sound and orthodox doctrine according to the dispositions and understanding of the faithful, ensure that while the mother is honored, the Son through whom all things have their being and in whom it has pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell, is rightly loved and glorified and His commandments are observed" (see Second Vatican Council, Lumen Gentium, VII, 66).

Today's scripture passage, found only in the Gospel of Luke, fulfills the prophecy found in Genesis. God pronounces judgment against Adam, Eve, and the serpent for their sinful rebellion. To the serpent, God says, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." Genesis 3:15. This verse is known as the *protoevangelium*, or the "First Gospel," because it introduces the theme of a Savior who will redeem humanity from the curse of sin (Galatians 3:13). In Genesis 3, the Savior is called the "Seed" of the woman. (Catholic Answers, Who is "the seed of the woman" in Genesis 3:15)

In the book published in 2009, A History of Christianity by Diarmaid MacCulloch, comes a concise understanding of this special devotion for Mary alone: *By the thirteenth century, the growth of devotion to Mary, the Mother of God, in both East and West led St. John of Damascus's admirer St. Thomas Aquinas to formalize a further refinement: the concept of an exceptional sort of veneration, hyperdulia, offered only to the greatest of God's creations, Mary, the mother of Jesus.*

In reflection today, ponder as Mary did the inbreaking of God from the heavens into earthly existence, where Mary, in an act of free will, said "Yes! Be it done to me!" Has Advent prepared us to follow Christianity's First Disciple Mary, Mother of God, in bringing Christ to others through our discipleship and ministry in the world?

*Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now, and at the hour of our death. AMEN!*

**A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke**

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.

***The Gospel of the Lord***

