



## Mary's freedom to say 'yes'

In Christian history and tradition, there are numerous people who said 'yes' – one of them is Mary. Her 'yes' mattered for our salvation!

You may wish to start your meditation by prayerfully reading the Annunciation's account in **Luke 1: 26 – 38**.

We now turn our gaze on a piece of art by Sandro Botticelli that depicts the Annunciation. Let this piece of art speak to you as you take a deep look at it and let it help you contemplate that time when the Angel Gabriel approached Mary with humility to announce to her Jesus' conception. In the painting we can see that whilst Mary pulls back, she reaches out...



*The Annunciation by Sandro Botticelli, 1489*

Christopher Alt SJ explains Mary's vocation story as he looks at this painting in this *One-Minute Reflection* that he delivered on the feast of the Annunciation:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W80xEN6Z3tQ>

The Angel has to wait until Mary has given her answer. With the benefit of hindsight, we assume that the only answer she could possibly have given is "let what you have said be done to me." However, that is not the case. Christian tradition is clear that Mary's answer was not known in advance, how could it have been? She had to give her consent to God's call with complete freedom.

The Church Fathers speak of how the whole of creation held its breath waiting, uncertain, hoping for this young woman to give her consent to God's plan. **St Bernard of Clairvaux** sums up the tension, hope and uncertainty of the situation when, in one of his homilies, he writes:

**The angel is waiting for your answer: it is time for him to return to God who sent him. We too are waiting...If you consent straightway shall we be freed... the whole world is waiting...**

**And rightly so, for on your lips is hanging the consolation of the wretched, the redemption of the captive, the speedy deliverance of all who otherwise are lost; in a word, the salvation of all Adam's children, of all your race.**

**Answer, O Virgin, answer the angel speedily; rather, through the angel, answer your Lord. Speak the word, and receive the Word; offer what is yours, and conceive what is of God; give what is temporal, and embrace what is the eternal. Why delay? Why tremble? Believe, speak, receive! Let your humility put on boldness, and your modesty be clothed with trust...**

**And Mary said: *Behold the handmaid of the Lord: be it done to me according to your word.***

In this homily, St Bernard reveals how, in her encounter with the Angel, Mary took time to discover the deepest response her heart could make to the request. Her pondering led her to a response of complete self-giving and humility. It's a response that could only have come from a strong woman with a courageous, wise and faithful heart.

Our lives are filled with people who say and who have said 'yes'. They have said 'yes' to doing the right thing. They have said 'yes' to taking on a difficult, but worthy path. They have said 'yes' to love and self-sacrifice. They have said 'yes' to God.

Saying 'yes' is a vital part of our relationship with God. As is our freedom to say 'no' as well. So many times in your life you might look back on now and see clearly that you said 'no' (even if you didn't understand it as saying 'no' to God at the time). You might recall some times of saying 'yes' too. Saying 'yes' to God enables us to be a living presence of love, joy and mercy in this world. Our 'yes' always draws us to love and value ourselves, others and the world around us.

Mary may not have known exactly what she was saying 'yes' to and she certainly didn't know where her 'yes' would take her (both the pain and the glory). But she had the wisdom to know that God was asking and that she should say 'yes'.

If you're faced with a difficult 'yes' at the moment, remember you're in good company with Mary. Know this too: those who say 'yes' are gifted for that 'yes'. You too will be gifted for your 'yes'.

- ***What do you need to say 'no' to?***
- ***What do you need to be saying 'yes' to?***
- ***Where is God calling you today? ... How will you respond?***

Take some time to ponder on these questions and your answers to them. You may wish to write down your thoughts and prayers in your prayer journal / notebook...