

Since the dawn of time, individuals, tribal leaders, officials, kings, emperors, presidents, and institutions, have met for one reason or another; but none of them, no matter how important the place where it is held, has ever reached or will reach the exceptional importance of that meeting that took place around 2000 years ago, in a modest house in Nazareth, on an unknown day, between the Archangel Gabriel and a young girl of around 14 years old, whose name was Mary.

The time to send His Son into the world was then fulfilled (Gal 4:4). But “the world was unworthy to receive the Son of God immediately from the hands of the Father. [Therefore,] God delegated one of the prime ministers of His court to reach out to Mary asking her to receive His Son. The Son of God became Man for our salvation, in Mary, and through Mary. God the Holy Spirit formed Jesus Christ in Mary, but only after giving Him her consent” (St Augustine). Mary said “yes”, *Fiat Voluntas Tua*; and from that moment, the history of the world took its decisive turn.

We are here to learn how to grow in a loving relationship with the Lord. However, we will not get there without looking at Mary and her attitude. When we look at her, what do we see?

Today’s Gospel portrays the Virgin Mary as a puzzled young girl seeking to understand. A young girl who was struggling with her limits; but, above all, a young girl who knew how to listen and who unreservedly surrendered to the Lord’s will. She said, “How can this be done?” Yet, in the end, she affirmed: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word!”

Mary didn’t rely on her limits as a human being but on the Lord’s strength. This is the very meaning of the name Gabriel: ‘strength of God’.

Remember, what Mary knew how to do best and teaches us to do, is to listen to the Word of God. Speaking of God’s Word, what is it telling us today?

If we look closely at both the first reading and the Gospel, we will see that there is something in common; God is looking for a home among us and wants to place His tent with His people. It is this mystery that we are preparing to celebrate today. He will come among us, and we know that He will no longer be born in the manger of Bethlehem, but instead take residence in the silence of our hearts.

Brothers & sisters, as in Bethlehem, around 2000 years ago, a meeting is taking place here and now. And as He asked Mary, the Lord is making the same request to us, each one personally: “Can your heart be the new living manger to welcome My Son?”

God doesn't force us. He imposes nothing, not even salvation... Nonetheless, He is expecting a “yes”, which springs from our freedom. Let us not be limited by human possibility; because in any case, it won't be us, but the Strength of God – the Holy Spirit – that will intervene. And if we give our “yes” to the Lord, we will be able to bear witness to Jesus and our faith; and Christmas will not only be December 25<sup>th</sup>, but every day, every moment of our lives.

Mary committed herself completely and faithfully. What about you?

Challenge:

Look for what scares you, what prevents you from responding to the Lord's invitation, and ask the Lord for the courage to overcome them and the grace to make your heart the new living manger welcoming the Child of Bethlehem.