

Mary, Woman of Faith

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on the fourth Sunday in Advent, December 22, 1996. Scripture Lessons: 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Luke 1:47-55; Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Last Tuesday, at a Solanco Basketball game, I was trying to find just the right words for a half-time announcement about a fund raiser for the basketball teams. I asked one of the mothers, "Should I say 'the boys and girls' or the 'mens and womens' teams are selling pizza?" I wanted my announcement to be politically correct. One mother responded emphatically, "My daughter is 14 years old. She's not a woman. She's a girl. It's a girls basketball team." I was afraid to argue with her. I came home and checked out the dictionary. It says a "girl" is "a young, unmarried woman." It also warns that it can be offensive to call any woman, even a young woman, a girl.

I hope no one will be offended if I call the Virgin Mary a girl, a young, unmarried woman. A woman and yet a girl. A mother and yet a virgin. When you think of the Virgin Mary, think of a girl - a ninth grade girl - a 14 or 15 year old girl. The Lord chose an unmarried teen age girl to be the mother of his Son. That's a scary thought!

Teenage pregnancy is a scary thought as Kimberly Evanovich can tell you. She owns her own marketing consulting company in Santa Cruz, California. She was having lunch with the chief executive officer of a software company. He was considering Kim as a consultant for a lucrative overseas project. All had gone well. They were waiting for the check when a very young, very pregnant woman passed by ^{perhaps a little older than the Virgin Mary would have been} pushing a stroller.

The CEO snorted with disgust. "That makes me sick. You'd think she'd stop creating new mouths for the government to feed." He wasn't aware that Kimberly, at age 28, even had children - let alone kids old enough to be in the fourth and fifth grades. He saw Kim's suit and Gold Card and assumed she shared his view that teen mothers deserve no compassion. Nothing could be further from the truth.

In fact, Kimberly accidentally became pregnant at 17. "I was terrified", she said. "I cried when I got my first positive pregnancy test and promptly got three more. My friends encouraged me to have an abortion. 'You hardly know the baby's father,' they said. 'You've got to think about your future'". But as logical as their arguments seemed, she just couldn't do it.

The shock of becoming a teenage parent paralyzed her at first. She looked in a mirror after her daughter was born. She tried to connect her face with her new identity. "Another human being", she thought, "is going to look at me and say, 'mother,' but all I could think was that I wanted my own mother."

"I was terrified. I cried. I was almost paralyzed," she said. I imagine that's how the Virgin Mary felt when she got the news that she was going to be an unmarried, pregnant teenager. No wonder the Angel Gabriel said, "Do not be afraid, Mary."

Kimberly Evanovitch often got the message that the game was over for her. The father of her child abandoned her. Her parents couldn't support her. Why struggle to win when the world is convinced you've lost? But she was a woman of faith. She

believed she could make it. She worked two jobs while earning a college degree. She now owns her own business. She says, "Over the years I came to accept, and love, my life as a parent. What I couldn't accept was the way I was treated. As I near 30, remarks about teen moms simply annoy me; when I was 18, they stung." *She accomplished all that and she feels like that because she's a woman of faith.*

Faith is not a passive thing. Faith is active. Faith is assertive. Mary is traditionally pictured as a passive, submissive woman. But that's a false image, an image that harms women who passively suffer abuse. What we actually see in Scripture is not a passive woman but a feisty *woman of faith* lady. In the face of men and women who distainfully say of teen mothers, "That makes me sick. You'd think she'd stop creating new mouths for the government to feed." In the face of that kind of contempt, the Virgin Mary assertively sings, "God has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He's brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he's filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty." *Mary was a woman of faith,*

Despite everything that was against the Virgin Mary - she believed the Lord. The most blessed woman in the world was an unmarried, pregnant teenager. She married a man who wasn't the father of her child. After the 12th birthday of Jesus, we never hear about her husband Joseph. Tradition says he died leaving Mary a single parent. What we comfortable middle class Christians often forget is that God chose to reveal himself supremely through a child from what we might call a poor, messed-up family. But the Lord gave the Virgin Mary a feisty spirit

that enabled her, and all who share her faith, to overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles. *Confident that God will lift up the lowly and fill the hungry with good things.*

Tom Long writes that on the wall of the museum of the concentration camp at Dachau is a moving photograph of a mother and her little girl being taken to a gas chamber in Auschwitz. The girl, who is walking in front of her mother, doesn't know where she's going. The mother, who walks behind, does know, but there's nothing, absolutely nothing, the mother can do to stop this tragedy. In her helplessness, she performs the only act of love left to her. She places her hand over her little girl's eyes so, at least, she won't have to see the horror which faces her. When people see this picture in the museum, Long says, they do not move quickly or easily to the next one. You can feel their emotion, almost hear their cries, "O God, don't let that be all there is. Somewhere, somehow, set things right."

That's the cry of many who, like the young Virgin Mary, find themselves in what appear to be hopeless situations. "O God, don't let this be all there is. Set things right." Luke's word to us today is that God hears those prayers. God lifts up the lowly and fills the hungry with good things - setting things right.

Let us pray: God of grace, you chose the Virgin Mary, full of grace, to be the mother of our Lord and Savior. Now fill us with your grace, that with her, we may rejoice in your salvation, and in all things, embrace your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

JOYS AND CONCERNS

Those who have lost jobs or who seeking jobs

Those who have recently undergone surgery

Dee Bridges (Faye's daughter Karen's mother in law - recovering

Sharon and Joseph McIlhenney and their daughter, Elizabeth Rose

Jo Durbin

Today is Jean Shanks Birthday

Elaine Johnson's mother died

Dr Farrell's mother died

Jim Siemsen

Eywanne Griffin + faber girl

Weaver's 50th wedding anniversary

Cousin's boyfriend has cancer, depressed