

## December 20

Corpus Christi Church

Simbang Gabi, 2019

Dear Father Hamilton, Father James and dear brothers and sisters in Christ gathered for this Simbang Gabi celebration in anticipation of our celebration of the Lord's birth:

### *Introduction*

This Gospel is stupendous; it tells us of that astonishing event when Mary of Nazareth accepted to become the Mother of the Messiah, and Jesus, the eternal Son of God, took life from her womb by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit.

In this evening's homily I want to concentrate on just two words, at least they are two words in Latin, though it takes more words in English to get their meaning across. Those words are *Ave* and *Fiat*. As we go along, I'll explain what they meant for Mary and for us today.

### *1. "Ave": Rejoice*

We can begin by citing the first word spoke by the Angel Gabriel to Mary: "Hail" or "Ave" in the Latin. It was a familiar greeting in ordinary speech that just meant "hello." But, when we look behind the *Ave* to the original language that the Angel spoke to Mary, something more profound than "hello" is really being said. It means "Rejoice, be glad."

Why should Mary rejoice at what must have been a surprising, even terrifying, experience for her? Because this is the opening moment

of a new age in the history of salvation, the announcement of the long-awaited coming of the Messiah.

### ***Joy to the World***

We can therefore say that the first spoken word of the New Covenant is an invitation to joy: “rejoice, Full of grace, be glad O Mary!” This is the beginning of the “Good News” that brings us joy to humankind. This is exactly what we sing in the well-known Christmas carol, “Joy to the world, the Lord has come!”

This joy we wish for the world is also meant to touch our own lives, and not just a distant “world.” The joy proclaimed by Gabriel “fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ joy is constantly born anew.”<sup>1</sup>

This joy which comes from our closeness to Jesus and his Gospel is intended for everyone. No one can be excluded. That is what the angel proclaimed to the shepherds in Bethlehem: “Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people” (Lk 2:10).

And what is this Good News? Or what is the Gospel? That God is not remote from us, unknown, distant in the heavens or present only in

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<sup>1</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 1.

the past at Bethlehem. No! God is close to us, so close that he makes himself a Child in the womb of a young Virgin – and, because of his Resurrection, he lives with us forever.

It's no wonder, then, that the Angel Gabriel told Mary to rejoice. The long period of waiting for the Messiah, the One who would free people from the burden of their sins was coming to an end. Christ's birth changed everything – and still does.

## ***2. “Fiat”: Mary’s Answer to her Call***

Now to my second word: *fiat* – “let it be done,” or “do as you will/want.”

In her home at Nazareth Mary was called by God; that is, she was asked to do something she had never anticipated; indeed, to be someone she would never have imagined. At the Annunciation she received a new vocation, a calling to play an indispensable role in God's saving design for us.

Our calling from God takes a less dramatic form – at least usually. Most of us received the greatest call we can ever receive at our Baptism: “to be holy and blameless” before God. This is the first and greatest vocation of them all!

### ***Perplexity before the Call***

Like every calling from God, hers was not the result of her own will. She hadn't planned this or prepared for it. It came about according

to God's will. So with us. He chose when we came into existence, the time of our Baptism, and he will choose the moment of our leaving this world.

Certainly Mary was caught unawares. She wasn't expecting to be the Mother of the Messiah. When God gets close to us – as his Angel did to Mary – we are too are “perplexed” (cf. Lk 1:29). We wonder what God's call will mean. How will I be holy? What will be required of me? Can we step out into the light?

### ***Accepting***

Mary was not forced to be Jesus' Mother. God respected her freedom, just as he does ours. She had a choice! Just as we can choose to love God or not, to become involved with God or not.

The Angel Gabriel's proclamation was addressed to her; she accepted it, and responded from the depths of her heart. Mary said something absolutely astounding: “*Fiat*. Here I am . . . let it be with me according to your word” (Lk 1:38). At that very moment the eternal Word of God began to exist as a human being. As St. John says in his Gospel, “the Word became flesh” (Jn 1:4); he pitched his tent among us. This “let it be” of Mary is not just a reluctant but obedient acceptance, but also a trustful openness to the future. Her “let it be,” her *fiat*, expresses a trusting faith, setting the example for us when we face unforeseen situations, trials or hardships on our path to living out our

vocation to holiness.

The whole of Mary's life was a series of episodes of trust in God's will. It began with her "yes" at the Annunciation, but didn't finish there. This was only Act 1. At the foot of the Cross, Mary once again confirmed her vocation as a woman of great faith. There, on Calvary, it would have seemed that everything had come to an end; every earthly reason to have faith was extinguished as she saw her Son being cruelly murdered on the Cross. At that moment, remembering the promises of the Angel Gabriel that her Son would receive the throne of David and have a kingdom without end (cf. Lk 1:32-33), she could have said: "the promises didn't come true; I was deceived." But she did not say this. And so, in this hour of her second *fiat*, an older and widowed Mary confirmed her trust that the will of God, despite all appearances, is always directed to our salvation, that he can only will the good for his creatures.

In the course of our lives, on various occasions, we too must say our *fiat*, bending our wills and minds and hearts to that of the Father, who always knows best.

### ***Conclusion***

As we prepare for the celebration of Christ's birth, let's recall that it brings with it an invitation for us to recall and commit to live the "annunciation" we have each received: to rejoice because we have

received a vocation to holiness: to live in friendship with God and the sacrificial service of our brothers and sisters.

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