



## BELLVILLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

A Congregation of the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa

PO BOX 552 • BELLVILLE • 7535  
 LINGEN STREET • BELLVILLE • 7530  
 TEL: 021 948-2417 / 021 948-2529  
 FAX: 021 948-2419  
 e-mail: bellville@presbyterian.org.za

### ADVENT 4 – Mary

**Luke 1: 26-38**

~ Brent Russell ~

17<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2005

#### READING:

**LUKE 1:26-38**

#### • Who was the First Christian?

- The first Sunday in Advent is a **focus on the prophets** who told us that God's anointed one would come
- The second Sunday is **about God's word** – Christ himself and the word of God the Bible – the witness to Christ
- The third Sunday in advent is the time when we **centre on John the Baptist**
- **And the fourth Sunday in Advent is all about Mary**
- **This simple young girl who forever would have part to play in changing history**
- Mary has been the **centre of attention** for many centuries
- The **worship of her** has been one of the most **contentious issues** in the life of the church
- **Catholic theology** historically has **elevated her to Godlike status** far beyond anything ever suggested in the scriptures or commanded by Jesus in any way
- She has been given **place and power** in their theology that is **unhelpful, unscriptural and idolatrous**
- This sounds serious and indeed it is...
- **Rod teases** me occasionally about this, highlighting certain articles or statements from various authors
- And I must confess that it is a tension within me because **she is an important person** and has been called **Theotokos**, the mother of God
- But to the worship of her is an abuse and an affront to Christianity in every way

- And so I **hang between these two poles** either to elevate her to a status she should not have Or to ignore her entirely
- **I confess honestly though that I sit far more closely to ignoring her than elevating her – hence Rod's teasing**
- **At least part of the movement of the reformation was to move away from the worship of Mary**
- I believe that the reformation though for all it's good, has **taken Mary too much out of our life of faith**
- In many ways the reformation **threw out the baby with the bathwater** with many things
- And with Mary too the reaction against the Roman Catholic idolatry has meant that we **focus at some point too little on this woman of faith**
- And so as much as we focus on others, Isaiah, John the Baptist and their lives we should to concentrate on her
- **She, who was highly favoured by God**
- **And so today we honour her for her role in Jesus life**
- **And we look at her life to see what we can learn**
- **Perhaps the most helpful portrayal of Mary I have seen was Monica Belucci in the 'Passion of the Christ' by Mel Gibson**
- It was for me the first time I was able to see her as would certainly have been
- A **simple, plain woman** and most importantly a mother to her son
- **A mommy**
- It was this relationship more than any other that defined her life and that gave her life meaning and purpose

- This sermon has two halves to it:

## **THE FIRST HALF OF THE STORY...**

- **I want to talk a bit about the virgin birth**
- **God uses this woman to give life to his Son**
- I am not sure it really should be called the **virgin birth** but rather the **virgin conception**
- Birth is birth is birth - a miracle nonetheless
  
- **I am NOT talking about the immaculate conception**
- that is **another heresy** about Mary stating that she was born sinless
  
- **But I am talking about the conception of Jesus in Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit**
- **It is in the miracle of this conception that God does his profoundest work**
- The **biological conception** of life ordinarily is an awesome thing
- That two cells containing all the genetic diversity of the parents should join and become one
- **And the result is this miracle of new life**
- **How much more this miracle in which god is made incarnate**
- **Many people do not believe in the virgin birth – or virgin conception**
- And I am sure that **within this congregation** are those who doubt it
- **Who wonder about the honesty of the accounts in the scriptures**
- In fact one of my most **learned colleagues** has stated that he believes in the virgin conception of Jesus only because it was an act of God's grace - not just because it is in the Bible
- **I believe that this act of God is of vital importance for us to understand**
- **It is explicit in the most basic and elemental statements of our faith, the Apostles and Nicene creeds**
- It is an essential in our belief in Jesus
- **So let me help you understand why it is so important**
- **Plants and animals too have this amazing ability to breed and multiply**
- And as much as we have **cross bred** both plants and animals to make them bigger and stronger for our use, it is impossible for us to breed some new type of creature
- **We cannot cross breed and create some new never before seen beast**
- If you took a **dog** and a **chicken** you don't get a 'chog'
- You cannot take a **Sheep** and a **fish** and get 'feep' or 'shish'
- **Biological differences means that the two animals cannot cross breed**
- And so you are **stuck with dogs**

- You can cross breed to change **size, colour** and **temperament**
- **But you cannot make a dog anything other than a dog**
- **And so it is with people**
- Humans, biologically can only breed with each other
- And so we are left with people
- **A human bred with a human gives us a human**
- **But tied up in this too is the cycle of depravity, sin and evil that continues unbroken through all of human history**
- **When people have children they pass on all of who they are**
- There are **physical traits** like **hair colour**, or the **shape of the mouth** they are passed on from one of the parents to the offspring
- But so to is our **temperament**
- Some of our **personality is genetically predetermined** and cannot be altered
  
- But as well as the physical and emotional inheritance from our parents we receive a spiritual heredity too
- There is this part of our spiritual nature that tends towards evil that is given to us by our parents
- And so all human nature will tend towards evil, like a the water in a river will relentlessly seek the lowest point in a valley
- **So how do we get out of the mess?**
- Here we are trapped forever because sinful nature is passed on from parents to children
- A infinity of humanity trapped in this cycle of ruin
- **We cannot get out of it ourselves**
- **We are trapped with this sinful nature**
- Like our hair we can cover it with all sorts of things
- But it will remain unchanged
- **And so God breaks the cycle in the body of this young Jewish girl from Galilee called Mary**
- **On our own we cannot change we are**
- **We cannot take away this desire in us to do wrong**
- We could not as Hitler tried to do **breed a new nation** of good people
- **Because we are all human – sinful**
- And **humans beget humans**
- **And so as nice as our parents are their sinful nature is passed on to us**
- **But God breaks this cycle by putting in Mary the start of new life**
- One who is **God and man**
- **The fullness of Deity and Humanity intertwined**

- And it is only by this act of God's immeasurable Grace that our humanity in Jesus is freed from this bondage of sin
- **The life that developed in Mary was sinless – this child who would become the saviour of the world**
- **Are you with me – The only way for a sinless human to be born was if God made himself one with us**
- **If god inserted some perfect DNA into the equation**
- **And that is what he did in sending Jesus**
- Are you happy?
- **In binding himself to God made for us a way to get to heaven**

- But that is only half the story:

## **THE SECOND HALF OF THE STORY...**

- **The first half of this story of Mary is how God made himself one with her to give to humanity a way out of the 'dwang'**
- **To give us a way by which we can enter the realm of the Glory of God**
- But that is the first half only
- **The second half the story is us responding to this way made open for us in Jesus**
- **us allowing ourselves to become one with Him as individuals that we might walk that path**

### **Rest**

- **On Christmas day a bunch of people are going to go to church**
- If this is your first Christmas here at BPC let me help you – it is **going to be full**, come early
- But for many of those people they will come because it is the **right thing** to do
- **But in so doing many of them will have made a terrible mistake**
- They will **know about Jesus**, they will have **seen 'the way'**
- **but will not have walked in it**
  
- **They will have understood that in the incarnation God bound himself to us that we might find life**
- **But they have refused to allow themselves to bound to him that they might actually have it**

- Late one night a man called Nicodemus came to Jesus and Jesus spoke to him with a wonderful illustration:
- **John 3:3** "I tell you the truth Nicodemus, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."
- **Jesus was born into humanity to make a way for us to get to God**
- To **give as a way** to be free from sin
- **To meet us half way, if you like**
- **But we have to step the other half of the journey**
- We have to be **born again** to taste what Jesus came to give
- **This God who is spirit allowed himself to be born into humanity to make the way open**
- **We the saints who are human have allowed ourselves to be born of Spirit to walk in that way**
- **And so in the life of Mary God gives us the way to heaven**
- And this simple young girl Mary is herself is **the first walk in that way**
- **By accepting Jesus in a wonderfully real and tangible way she becomes unwittingly the first to know the promise of eternal life in Him**
- **And Mary accepted Him the same way that we all accept Christ**
- By simple **childlike faith**
- Our last image of Mary in the Bible is a great one in acts: "*They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.*"
- When the angel told her about this **impossibility** – that she would have a child, her response was a **faith response: May it be to me as you have said...**
- When she came to Jesus at the **wedding in Cana** in Galilee because the wine had run out it was a **faith response: Jesus they've got no more wine...**
- And finally in **Acts** we find her on her knees **praying in a faith response to God**
- When we respond in faith we step towards God
- **Not simply looking at the path opened, but walking along it**

## **CONCLUSION**

- **The only path to God is Christ**
- **In Mary God himself who is Spirit reached out and made himself one with our humanity gave the way to eternity**
- **But it is only when we find faith that we step along the path**
- **Into the unknown and the unknowable**
- **Into the riches and mysteries of God's grace**
- **That we are made one with Christ**
- **Faith is not something we can sort of have**
- **We cannot partially have faith**
- **This is a complete and full-blown commitment**
- **When promised the Christ child Mary could not be sort of pregnant**
- **Half pregnant, partially pregnant**
- **It was a total commitment to God's plan for her life**
- **And so it is when we respond to Jesus**
- **It is really an all or nothing affair**
- **Like having a child you have to commit 100%**
- **And your life will be forever changed**
- **Nothing will ever quite look the same**
- **And you will never quite be the same again**
- **This is the message of advent and the message of Christmas**
- **The waiting for the way to the Father to be revealed**
- **The heartbreak is that so many will come on Christmas day and look at the way**
- **They will see the path**
- **They may even declare how beautiful it is**
- **But they will stare Jesus in the face but will turn away not becoming one with him**
- **So share the message of the incarnation this Christmas with those around you**
- **That God made himself entirely one with our humanity to open up the way to be saved**
- **And that at Christmas he calls us once again to be entirely one with him that we might walk in that way**
- **That we might live and life in abundance**
- **That we might find rest for our souls**
- **That we might be blessed by him**
- **He is after all "The way the truth and the life" who leads us to the Father**