

25 March 2020

Statement for website from Fr. Michael Basque

First, a few things you should know.

- Bishop Bergie has closed the Catholic Center until further notice. All Parish Offices are also to be closed with employees working from home whenever possible.
- A number of people have inquired about making their Offertory donations through Direct Deposit. I would strongly encourage all parishioners to do so. If you are interested, please e-mail the Parish Office at holyrosary@cogeco.net. You can also donate money to the Parish electronically by connecting to www.CanadaHelps.org. As you can imagine, Parish revenues have dropped significantly over the past few weeks and will remain low for a while. Regular Parish expenses (utilities, insurance, etc.) are draining our financial reserves. It is important parishioners continue to financially support the Parish on a regular basis. Donations may be dropped off at the Parish office using the mail slot in the Office door, by signing up for Direct Deposit, through our website, or visit www.CanadaHelps.org. Those Parishioners who may be in a position to do so are asked to consider making an additional donation to help improve the cash flow. Anything you can give us is appreciated.

Most of the news we have heard lately is not good. Each day we hear about the growing number of cases and deaths of people infected with Covid 19 in our province, country and world. We hear about grocery stores with long line-ups at the cash register and shelves empty of essential supplies. Business leaders are predicting the pandemic will cause reduced retirement income for seniors, higher unemployment for workers and failure for many small businesses. Medical and government officials seek to reassure us everything is fine but with worried looks on their faces. You could be forgiven for wanting to turn off the television and not sharing any news with anyone.

In today's Gospel, the angel Gabriel shares the news with Mary that she will become the mother of Jesus. The times during which Mary lived were not particularly good for her. She was a woman living in a society which placed little value on her sex. She was a Jew living in a land occupied by the Romans who levied heavy taxes on people and were ruthless in crushing any dissent. There were tensions between the two groups because Jews, unlike other nationalities within the Empire, refused to worship Roman gods or emperors. Mary lived in a non-descript town (Nazareth) in an unimportant part of Israel (Galilee). She was betrothed to Joseph (a bit of good news) but would now be pregnant without him being the biological father. Furthermore, many women died in child-birth at that time. While having a child is considered by many people to be good news, Mary could be forgiven for being a little unsettled.

Yet, Mary gives an unequivocal "yes" to the angel: she will be part of God's plan and give birth to Jesus. She also decides to visit her kinswoman Elizabeth to share the news. It doesn't say when she planned to tell Joseph, but Matthew's Gospel fills in that part of the story. Why would Mary respond in this way? Perhaps it was because she recognized God would be with her every step of this journey. The angel had already revealed how the conception problem would be handled. If God could do that, maybe she had nothing to fear. Of course, there would be hardships along the way. The child would be born in a barn and laid in a feeding trough for animals. Joseph would be there but would likely be of little help during childbirth. She would have no female relatives there to assist her with the delivery. The greatest multiplier of fear

during hard times is being alone. Yet, she would have God (and after the birth, His son) with her through all those challenges. What more did she need?

During this pandemic, members of all religions need to be people of faith. They need to tell others they are not alone in facing this crisis; God (and all people of faith) walk beside them. For Christians knowing that God became human, walked among us and died on the cross for our sins should give them extra strength. This does not mean God or Jesus will make Covid 19 disappear and we will all live happily ever after. The number of cases and deaths caused by the virus will go up. The economic impact during and after the pandemic will be terrible. Many people will lose their jobs and some their life savings. A lot of people will be starting over with nothing. So, how do you tell them there is any good news to hear? You do it by example.

If you think sharing good news today is challenging, imagine the situation Mary faced. Imagine the first time she had to face Joseph after becoming pregnant. There were likely a few awkward pauses in the conversation. After the “baby bump” appeared, imagine having to answer the questions of family members and nosy neighbours about what happened. Imagine the looks she would have endured from disapproving relatives. So, you think you have it tough? If a young woman who lived in a culture which placed little value on her, a nation which was occupied by an unfriendly power and a non-descript town in an unimportant region can do it, why can't we?

We are not alone. We can draw strength from that fact.