

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Dec 20th 2016

Contemplating the Visitation with Zechariah

Mary has been an important figure in my spiritual life. Many times I have specifically prayed for Mary's help, especially when my personal struggle involved family life and parenting difficulties. I typically envision Mary as an experienced and strong mother, and I will continue to turn to her in this role.

However, today's Gospel of the Annunciation has me thinking of Mary more as a child. She was likely about 12 years old when the angel Gabriel came to her announcing that she will bear a son and name him Jesus. My own daughter is about this age, and I have been thinking about how she might respond to this event. I am certain my daughter would be terrified by a supernatural visit, and I assume Mary felt afraid because Gabriel tries to comfort her. I hear the very practical confusion of a girl's perspective in Mary's reply to Gabriel indicating her virginity. She is just barely old enough to have a developed body, and she likely has only a sketchy outline of how women typically conceive. My daughter would be wondering if she had misunderstood an important piece of information in her inexperience, and hoping that no one accused her of doing things she had not done. I imagine Mary listening in disbelief and feeling overwhelmed throughout the entire conversation. My own daughter would certainly be anxiously hoping for an end to the visit. This moment was likely a very powerful, confusing, and scary experience for Mary, but at the end of this reading we see her faith in God and willingness to agree to His will shine through.

Thinking of today's reading and reflecting on Mary as a 12 year-old girl, I am not focused on Mary's attributes as a faithful or steadfast servant of God. Today I am thinking of her as a very real child, who accepted her situation as it arrived although she was likely overwhelmed by its prospects. She accepted her blessed role, despite the risks. Only later could she know that Joseph stayed with her, that she survived childbirth, that her Son was as amazing as Gabriel promised. Only later did she become the strong and suffering mother who I turn to in need for strength and guidance. In today's gospel, Mary was likely as confused and uncertain about her future as we all are. But despite her youth and anxiety about her future, she accepted God's will and went forward, accepting both the graces and the suffering of parenthood that followed and she held them all in her heart.

Amy Badura Brack-Creighton University's Psychology Department