

## 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent

In today's gospel we have the story of the angel, Gabriel, announcing to Mary that she is to be the mother of the Lord. During this Advent season as we prepare to celebrate Christmas, Mary as the centerpiece of showing us how to welcome the Lord into our lives.

Key question in today's gospel: How did Mary conceive?

St. Augustine said that spiritually, Mary began her conception through the ear. "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you!"

She LISTENED to Gabriel's words. Yes, through her ear she began to conceive.

Then she embraced those words in the heart. She pondered them deep within her. It was in her heart that the words took on life; became fully alive.

She embraced the message in her whole being;

Let it be done unto me according to your word.

Then the word which she embraced took flesh in her womb, in her life. She bore Christ into the world.

PAUSE

**Christ comes alive in us the same way.**

**Hail, full of grace; the Lord is with you!**

**How do we conceive?**

**Spiritual conceptions like Mary's still happen today. They are happening all the time!**

**For instance, a woman was attending a funeral here last week. She had been away from church for years. She didn't want to have anything to do with had no feelings for anything that dealt with the life of the Spirit or with God.**

**Yet in the midst of that funeral mass for her friend last Monday, she was overtaken by the Spirit. She experienced the presence of the Lord in some very real way.**

- **Not that anyone around her would have known it!**
- **But she had found life with the Lord**
- **As she spoke to me at the door of church, she pondered what had just happened to her.**
- **Something new had come alive deep within her.**
- **She asked if she could come back with her husband and join with the community in prayer.**
- **This woman listened, she pondered, she conceived new life in the Spirit.**

Ten there was a young college student last week who accompanied his sister on her visit to the parish. She had come in to register as a member. We were reviewing the many activities she could get involved with. He was sitting there, a bit slouched down, obviously bored.

- Then, all of a sudden, something hit him.
- He became involved with the discussion; wanted to volunteer to drive the bus on Sundays, he was interested in attending the young adult Christmas gathering this coming Friday evening.
- He obviously listened; pondered at what was being said; and responded from his heart with a new Spirit.

**Yes, new births in the Spirit are taking place all the time!**

For instance, a few weeks ago a family in the parish was throwing a Christmas party and an angel spoke to one of the members of that family; Well the angel did not exactly speak to her. But what this woman was inspired to do was ask members of her family to bring a gift to the party, NOT for each other, but for families in our community who needed help.

- She had listened, pondered, gave birth in the Spirit; and the family ended up filling half of the reconciliation room with gifts.

**Yes, spiritual births are happening all the time!**

**Mary is our model of how to allow spiritual births happen to us.**

**We need to listen ... to ponder...and to embrace.**

**I am convinced that God is still calling us:**

**to communion with the divine,**

**to have concern for our neighbor,**

**to embrace vocations of service and care in God's name.**

**This Christmas season we celebrate the Word of God becoming flesh.**

**God-becoming-alive-in-our-flesh" is not simply something that happened to Mary, a past event.**

**All we need to do is, like Mary, listen...ponder... embrace a new way of life.**

**Speak Lord, your servant is listening.**

**Let it be done unto me according to your Word.**