

A Meditation for the Fourth Sunday of Advent

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; hence the holy offspring to be born will be called Son of God" (Luke 1:35).

If you have little faith, you may find yourself tempted to explain away any and all of the miracles surrounding the birth of our Savior. Any honest reading of the Gospel accounts will make clear even to the unbeliever that the direct action of divine power is essential to the fabric of this account. Today's O antiphon evokes the image of the burning bush, which, because it was a sign of God's power and presence, was not destroyed by the fire. Many saints have taken this image of the burning bush as a symbol of the perpetual virginity of Mary.

Woven through the account of Jesus' conception and birth is the belief of those who participated (and of those who knew from firsthand accounts) that the outstretched hand of God was there. Once the possibility of the direct action of God's power is accepted, as it must be as an object of belief, then the Gospel accounts make perfect sense. How else could the eternal Word of God, equal to the Father in all things, become man expect by God's direct action?

Some may ask, "Why a virgin birth?" The obvious answer is, "Ask God." It is easy for doubt to enter here. It is even easier for mind games to take over. Some believe, but with smoke and mirrors.

As we approach the festal commemoration of the Messiah's birth, we need to foster a habit of mind that people find difficult. We need to reject quite consciously the rationalist prejudice that the human mind can comprehend everything in heaven and on earth. We are surrounded by natural mysteries, like gravity, time, and matter. We accept them, and go on. Why not the mystery of grace, the mystery beyond the natural world?

While it is unwise to attribute motives to God's actions, one can at least meditate on the reason for Christ's coming. The mystery of the human body and soul assumed by the eternal Son of God at the time of the Incarnation requires faith in an absolutely inexplicable act of God's power. It is the grace of all graces. How better could human beings come to appreciate the mystery of the Incarnation than to acknowledge that His mother conceived Him entirely by divine power and not by any human intervention?

O Adonai and Ruler of the house of Israel, You appeared to Moses in the fire of the burning bush, and on Mount Sinai gave him your law. Come, and with an out-stretched arm redeem us!

O Holy Spirit, fire of the burning bush, Your presence and action did not coerce the Virgin but freely made her mother of the Son of God. Speak in our hearts with the same divine power with which You spoke to Moses so that we may believe and come to salvation. Amen.

—Meditation and Prayer by Rev. Benedict Groeschel, C.F.R.

