



THE VISITATION

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Mary: The Mother of a New Inheritance

Venus Wozniak

On that fateful day - maybe she was saying her nightly prayers, or maybe she was waking and praising God for the gift of a new day - the Angel Gabriel came to her and told her she would bear a son, and call him Jesus. She responded, "I am the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done to me according to your word." Yes! She said, yes.

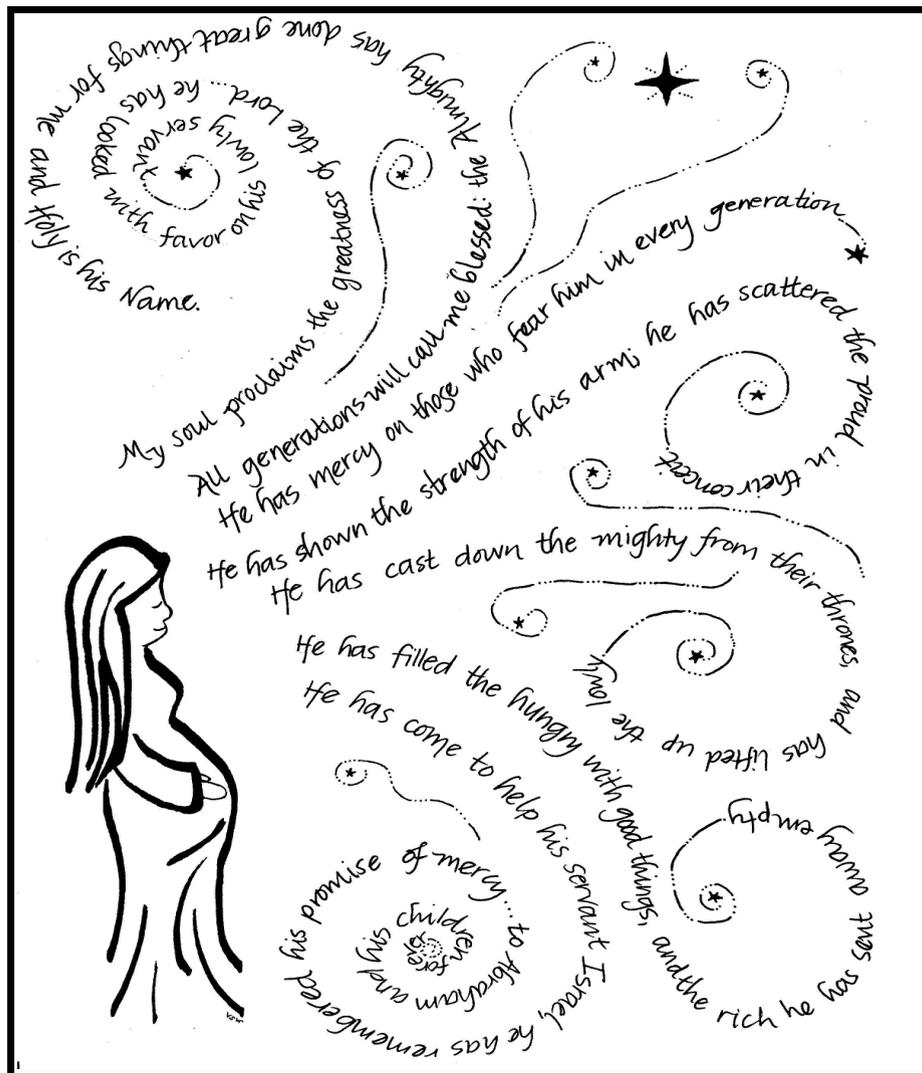
Mary was a young virgin- maybe fourteen or fifteen. Mary was not married - engaged, but not married. And Joseph, the good man that he was, had intentions of divorcing her quietly. A yes meant that she was on the fray of society. Still, she said, Yes! What an incredible act of faith.

Mary's yes gave birth to a new inheritance of faith for generations to come.

Through her yes - committed with fullness of heart, body and soul - she gave life to the whole world (*Lumen Gentium*, 53.) The new life that she carried within her, the incarnation of the Christ, would be the salvation of the world. Through her initial act of love, the work of motherhood, the ultimate act of love could be accomplished through her son, Jesus Christ. With a joyful countenance she "cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope and burning charity in the work of the Savior in restoring supernatural life to souls" (LG 61.) The inheritance of original sin and death left to us by Eve was restored through the obedience of Mary. Her obedience and faith led her to the foot of the cross where Jesus gifted her to us; *Woman, here is your son, and to the disciple, Here is your mother. From that time on, this disciple took her into his home* (John 19:26-27.) Through her yes, Mary became a life-giver. She gave life to the Anointed One and through him gave new life to each of us. Mary. Mother of God. Mother of us all.

Through her yes, Mary committed to a life of austerity and sorrow. Upon greeting her cousin Elizabeth, Mary considers the work of her Son and Savior, *He has shown strength*

ministry; *foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head* (Luke 9:58.) Mary closely accompanied Jesus throughout his



with His arm: *He has scattered the proud in their conceit. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty* (Luke 1:46-55.) And months later this young girl had no where to rest and give birth to her Son. Jesus was born to a mother and father who had only a water trough to lay him in. Jesus, the son of God, chose to born under these circumstances. He chose also a life of commitment to his

ministry. With her yes, Mary submitted to a life of simplicity and detachment - the ultimate paradigm of Christ being enough.

Mary is further reminded of her life's work by Simeon at Jesus' presentation, *This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too* (Luke 2:34-35.) The Israelites were waiting for a strong king with a

powerful military to free them from political oppression. Instead, the Anointed One came to upset the status quo by attending to the least of society and promoting love of all, not just a chosen few. Mary was devoted to the life and work of her Son, standing close by all the way to the cross. She took the "intensity of his suffering, associated herself with his sacrifice in her mother's heart, and lovingly consented to the immolation of this victim which was born of her" (LG 58.) Through her yes, Mary's heart was pierced with intense love and suffering. Mary. Mother of Sorrows. Mother of the Poor.

Through her yes, Mary became the first member of the Body of Christ. She provided, with the handiwork of the Holy Spirit, fertile soil for first seeds of faith to be planted. Her devotion to the Christ led her to the foot of the cross. The seeds of her faith became yet even more profound through Jesus giving us his Mother. She continued to be his advocate after his death, resurrection and assumption; *they all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers* (Acts 1:14.) As the first member of the Body of Christ, Mary "shines forth to the whole community [of the faithful] as the model of virtues" (LG 65.) Mary's life is exemplary to the remaining members of the Body of Christ, the faithful. Through her yes, we the Body of Christ, are led to the foot of His cross. Mary. Mother of the Body of Christ. Mother of the Church.

Mary said yes to God. She never said no. She didn't have to because of her immense faith she was able to take comfort in the gift of her Son. That was enough. 🏠

Venus is a Montessori teacher. She is member of Our Lady of Peace Parish where she serves on the Parish Council. She may be contacted at venusad@nativity-house.org

Say anything so absurd: Financial Hardship and the Parish Community

Justin M. Wozniak

Sometimes the least likely things to discuss are those of which everyone is aware and with which everyone is comfortable. Who wants to discuss the re-run TV shows between seasons or the comedy picture that one feels obligated to catch? Particularly when the items in question are bad. No one wants to talk about things that are old, bad, and accepted. Only a personal connection can make these kinds of topics worth discussing. I think the economic situation is one of these things, and a personal viewpoint on it is required to think about it and speak about it.

Our parishes are not isolated from the last few years of what I will refer to as the "new economy" (I don't think terms like recession or downturn capture the ongoing nature of the situation). What is the appropriate thing for parishes to say or do about the new economy?

First off, it would be good for parish leaders to have the facts regarding the

situation in hand. We are obviously not going to be able to get this knowledge directly from affected parishioners. The September report from the US Census Bureau, and a smattering of facts from the media, allow us to piece together a picture of the large scale situation. From there, parishes can think about how this could affect individuals and families. *It is relatively easy for leaders to spot traditional poverty and its related issues, but it is tougher to envision families dealing with the consequences of falling out of the middle class.*

This is particularly true in DuPage County, which is often thought of as relatively wealthy but has recently seen a more significant drop in incomes than Cook County. Families we meet at church are more likely than ever to be struggling with house payments and other basic bills. A major driver for this is the duration of the new economic situation- the

fraction of the unemployed out of work for six months or more is at a stunningly high peak, driving record numbers of new people to food stamps month after month. This is expected to drive a large shift in the outlook for families and children- 6,000,000 children are expected to fall into poverty over the next decade. The stresses and shame from shifts in real families have a deep effect, with serious consequences. And it presents a challenge to the institution of marriage itself. 2009 had the lowest marriage rate in 100 years and an unprecedented 13% increase in co-habitation, causing the Census Bureau to comment "Perhaps the length of unemployment resulted in people exhausting other methods of coping - unemployment benefits, savings accounts, available credit, or assistance from friends and family."

But back to the personal. The new economy poses challenges that are difficult to address with traditional parish programs and projects. Parish leaders and ordinary churchgoers will have to dig deeper, tap into their interpersonal skills, counseling sensibilities, and spiritual companionship to effectively minister and walk with those affected. It is unlikely that you will know much

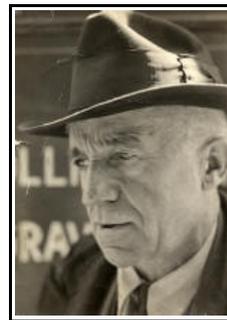
about the personal situation of an acquaintance at church, so it is more important than ever that warmth, friendliness, and consideration are clear in all of our interactions. Administratively, parish leaders could consider planning programs in light of the greater situation (although most probably are).

The new economy is a challenge of historical proportions. We will one day look back and evaluate ourselves on our response to this challenge as parishes and individuals. More importantly, though, we must keep in mind the sensitive situation faced by fellow parishioners as a real-world person-to-person matter. Each of us can think of ways to take the new economy into account in our relationships with others and in our parish life. Living life through a perspective of compassion for others can make our parishes a true source of counsel, and our communities a true place to build up a healthy society.



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Easy Essay: Parish Houses of Hospitality Peter Maurin (1877-1949)



Today we need Houses of Hospitality

as much as they needed them then,
if not more so.

We have Parish Houses for the priests,

Parish Houses for educational purposes,
Parish Houses for recreational purposes,
but no Parish Houses of Hospitality.

People with homes should

have a room of hospitality.
So as to give shelter
to the needy members
of the parish.

The remaining needy

members of the parish
should be given shelter in a Parish Home.
Furniture, clothing, and food
should be sent to the needy
members of the parish
at the Parish House of Hospitality.

We need Parish Homes

as well as Parish Domes. 

What is Nativity House?

Nativity House is a community project in progress. The community will soon include:

- A house of hospitality for first time mothers;
- A mothering community offering education and support for all mothers;
- A community supported farm (CSA) that will provide nourishment for the mothering community and the greater community; and
- A healing environment focused on the dignity of each person, the dignity of work, and stewardship of the earth.

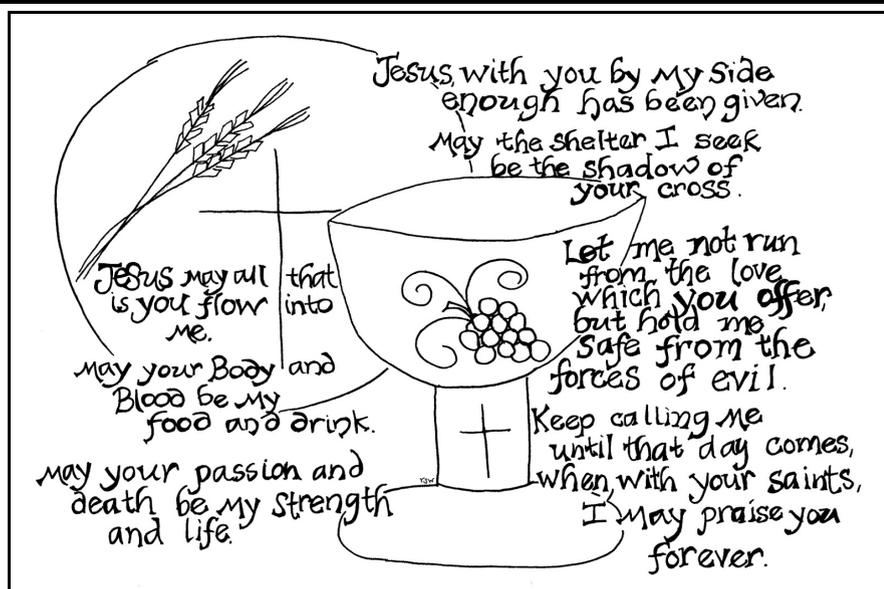
If you are interested in a subscription to *The Visitation* you can request one at <http://www.nativity-house.org>.

Call for Contributions

This is only the first issue of *The Visitation*! Please contact us if you would like to contribute. We need help with:

- Articles and topics: news, views, reviews, letters, event listings, etc.;
- Art: hand-drawn or graphic design; or
- Web and outreach volunteers.

To get involved, email us at newspaper@nativity-house.org



Theology & Thoughts: On *Deus Caritas Est*

Allison Covey

"If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, I gain nothing."

Pope Benedict XVI's first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, boils down to this. The title he has chosen says it all, God is Love. It sounds simple but immediately, we become bogged down with questions of language. What is love? Love is an overused and misunderstood word. We love our families, we love God but we also 'love' that song that just came on and relaxing over a long weekend.

The Pope divides his encyclical, addressed to all the faithful, into two parts. First, he tackles the definition of love by taking us on a trip through salvation history and the Greek language. Still trying to remember your high school Spanish? Not to worry, Benedict spells it all out as he examines the various understandings of love present not only in ancient texts but in today's human experience. The challenge of Christian love is to find a unity between *eros*, a worldly love, and *agape*, a "love grounded in and shaped by faith" (7). "Fundamentally, "love" is a single reality, but with different dimensions..." (8).

Humanity has always struggled with *eros*. The world of faith has sometimes seemed disconnected from, even opposed to, the physical world and its sensual pleasures. *Eros* has been abused, pulled from its proper context, and yet, in the Scriptures, God's relationship with Israel is described as a marriage, using sensual language (9). His love is not a vague, otherworldly concept but a personal relationship "in which both God and man remain

themselves and yet become fully one" (10). God is the supreme Creator and, at the same time, "a lover with all the passion of a true love" (10). In God, *eros* is purified and finds its purpose next to *agape*. Through matrimony, Christian couples model this marriage of the physical and spiritual, God and His people.

In Jesus, this love becomes incarnate. Christ's death on the cross is proof of Benedict's statement, *Deus Caritas Est*, but He does not stop there. In the Eucharist, Jesus draws us into His self-giving love, making us one with Him and with everyone who participates in Communion the world over. The Eucharist is necessarily social. Christ tells us that all the Law and the Prophets hang on love of God and love of neighbor (Mt 22). It is not enough to sit in the pew thinking fond thoughts though; our participation in the Eucharist must inspire a concrete, practical commitment to loving our neighbor (14). Benedict is not blind, however, to the challenges this poses.

He raises two questions: "Can we love God without seeing Him?" and "Can love be commanded?" (16). The first, he answers by pointing out that God is not invisible. We encounter God in Jesus, in the Eucharist but also in our neighbor. 1 John 4:20 teaches us that loving our neighbor is "a path that leads to the encounter with God and that closing our eyes to our neighbor also blinds us to God" (16). The answer to the second is no. We are able to love because God has loved us first. Our love is a response to our experience of His love for us, not obedience to a command. Loving God is about more than warm fuzzy feelings; it is the unification of our

Preparing for the Incarnation of the Christ

Venus Wozniak

Advent is a season of fine-tuning. This is the time when we focus on the fact that Jesus is indeed coming. We are given the opportunity to look deeper into our spiritual life and ponder our readiness for the gift of Jesus.

Jesus came into the world as a little child. He lived his life as one of us - lived a life of prophetic ministry, was put to death for it and then rose from the dead. He did all of this leaving us with a few very special gifts. One of these most exquisite gifts is the Eucharist and how we participate in this feast continually, not only at mass, but always. The feast is going on always- beyond all space and time. When we partake of the sacrament it

is the sign of the feast that we are at always.

So by the very nature of receiving the sacrament we are partaking in the other-worldly celebration. We receive Christ in the form of wine and bread that sustains and nourishes us. Each of us in the congregation receives this supernatural gift. Each one of us now has become a Christ-bearer. We have tapped into our unearthly inheritance of transformation.

We are called to allow this transformative nature of the Eucharist to work in us. We are all Christ-bearers. O, come let us adore...the Christ who dwells in each member of our community. 

sentiments with our intellect and will, an open-ended process that brings us more and more in sync with God's will until we are able to see others through God's eyes and love them as He does (17).

Once we understand what love is and that love of God and neighbor are one, the second part of Benedict's encyclical addresses practical application. The Church, he says, is an expression of love through her service to humanity's needs (19). Charity is now and always has been as much a part of her ministry as the celebration of the sacraments (22). Catholic charitable initiatives often work hand in hand with outside groups and yet, they maintain a unique character. The Church's charitable work cannot become merely another form of social assistance nor should it be used to proselytize; it must remain grounded in love (31). Its purpose is not creating political change, reordering society or bringing about economic justice; these goals are the responsibility of the State. While the Church inspires dialogue and forms consciences, politics is not her focus (28a).

Benedict rejects the Marxist notion that charity is a band-aid solution delaying economic justice. He also rejects the belief that, in a truly just society, charity is unnecessary, arguing that this view fails to acknowledge that the needs of the poor go beyond the material. Suffering people will always need a "loving personal concern"; they must be recognized as individuals, not pawns to be sacrificed for political change. As a result, those working in

Catholic charities must be both professionally competent and trained in the faith so that they are able to show a heartfelt concern for those they assist (28b, 31a). Benedict offers them two cautions. First, they must always practice humility, avoiding any feelings of superiority because it is only through the grace of God that they are in a position to help (35). Second, he urges them to pray. Rather than being a waste of time, prayer offers them the strength to avoid the despair and apathy often accountable for activist 'burnout' (36).

In the saints, especially Mary, we see wonderful models of faith, hope and love. Through their example, we realize that closeness to God does not mean withdrawing from the world but rather becoming closer to our neighbor. Our goal then is to "be fountains of living water in the midst of a thirsting world" (42). We are each called, through our baptism, to illuminate the earth with the love we have experienced first from God Himself (39). 

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Profile of a Saint

The Feast of the Holy Innocents

Venus Wozniak

December 28
Patron of Babies

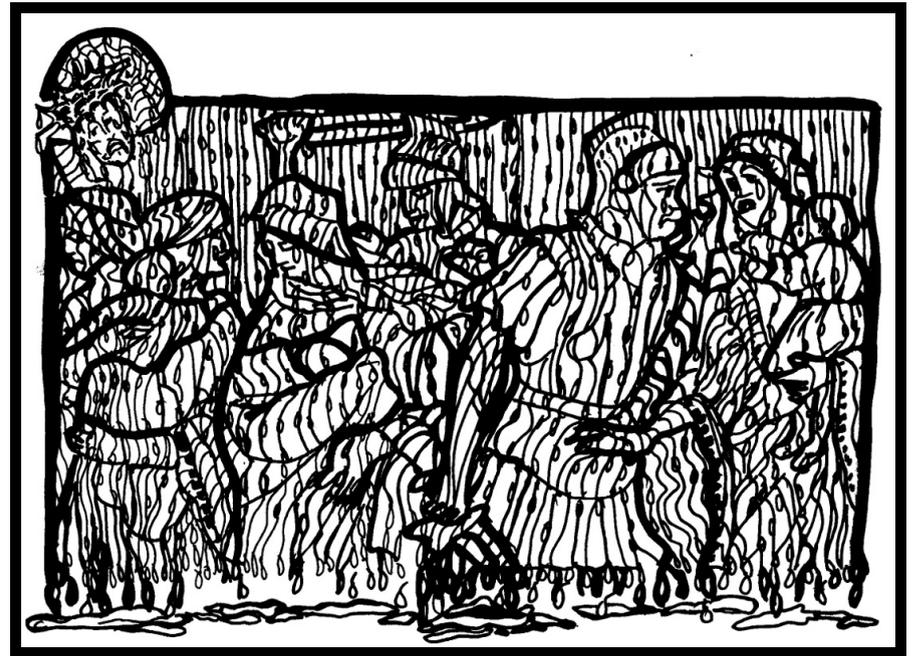
It did not take long for the leadership to feel threatened by Jesus.

Upon learning of the birth of the King of the Jews from the Magi, Herod was worried. Herod's immediate intent was to kill Jesus to ensure that no one overthrow the King of Judea. The Magi did not do as Herod requested. They were warned in a dream not to return to Herod with the Infant Jesus' whereabouts. When Herod deduced that he had been duped he ordered the death of all boys ages two and

under. Historians now estimate that this meant the death of somewhere between six and twenty children.

These innocent lives are the budding members of the community of saints - the first martyrs of the faith. They died not only for Christ but in his stead. The Holy Innocents are cited regularly as a reference point for young victims of war and abortion, and how innocent lives are sacrificed for power or greed.

When asking the intercession of these little saints we offer prayers for innocents who die as a result of violence and we offer thanksgiving for special watchfulness over the lives of precious infants. 



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