



DECLAN BISHOP OF CLIFTON

Pastoral Letter for the Solemnity of Mary, The Mother of God

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ

The new year begins with a blessing for us all:

May the Lord bless you and keep you

May the Lord let his face shine on you, and be gracious to you

May the Lord uncover his face to you and bring you peace.

Mary is blessed by Gabriel at the annunciation. Gabriel greets Mary; Hail full of grace the Lord is with you. The angel announces that Mary is to have a child whom she must name Jesus. Mary is disturbed by this message because she knows she is still a virgin. Gabriel tells Mary not to be afraid because the Holy Spirit will come upon her and she will bring forth new life. The angel awaits Mary's yes to this invitation. In a sense God is dependent upon the 'yes' of Mary. Without her consent God's plan would be frustrated. Similarly, God does not force himself on us. He waits for our yes then he is able to fill us with his grace - the life that make us alive.

The Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary and she proclaimed the greatness of the Lord. In Cana she was later able to say to people, referring to her son: 'do whatever he tells you'. This is the same mother who stood at the foot of the cross watching her son die. There she was given to us as our mother.

The news of Mary's pregnancy must have been overwhelming for Joseph, his family and for Mary and her Family. Joseph decided to divorce Mary informally rather than having her publicly shamed and stoned to death. He had a dream and in that dream the angel told him to take Mary to his home. Joseph's life was turned upside down as was the life of Mary, but he accepted the message of the angel and made a home for his wife and her expected child.

Mary is described as a model of the Church. She is the first disciple of her Lord. She is both virgin and mother. Her virginity is a symbol of her openness to God and in that openness, she gives birth to Jesus the Saviour of the World, the Word of God made flesh. He is truly human and truly divine.

Like Mary we are called to be open to God's presence and in that openness to bring forth Christ to our world today. We are the sacrament of Christ allowing the Holy Spirit to overshadow us so that we might proclaim the presence of God.


The Church in every generation is called to proclaim Jesus as the Christ. The good news always remains the same but the means of communicating the Gospel will change from age to age and from culture to culture.

Pope Francis has called us to walk together on our journey of faith. We are the People of God entrusted with the mission of Christ. Through our baptism and confirmation, we have a responsibility for the life and mission of the Church. Each of us has a particular vocation and a purpose given to us by God which is for the good of the whole Church and the wider community.

Our diocesan response, Listening with the Heart, in preparation for the Synod highlights the need for ongoing formation in order for us to be equipped for our vocation to be a missionary community. This stresses the important role both men and women share in the life of the Church. It also highlights the place of young people in the life of the community.

Listening with the Heart is all the more important as we face the future with fewer priests. How are we going to fulfil our mission in these changing times? A group of clergy and laity have drawn up proposals to move forward positively in these changing times. However, there is a need for a wider consultation and the group are currently preparing resources for this to happen.

Like Mary we may find our lives turned upside down but if we are open to the Holy Spirit changes can be positive and lead us in new and unexpected directions. In all of this we ask for the prayer of Mary Mother of God and model of discipleship.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Declan' with a stylized initial 'D' and a cross-like mark at the start.

Rt Rev Declan Lang
Bishop of Clifton

Listening to the Heart resources are available from our website cliftondiocese.com

To be read and made available in all
Churches and Chapels in the Clifton Diocese
on the Solemnity of Mary, The Mother of God 31st December 2022 / 1st January 2023.
This pastoral letter is also available from our website
cliftondiocese.com