

## Fourth Sunday of Advent

On this final Sunday of Advent the Church moves our gaze to the Annunciation. The whole scene hinges around one word: “Yes.” Mary's fiat sets in motion the entire Christian drama. In his film *Jesus of Nazareth* Franco Zeffirelli pictures the Annunciation this way: Mary is asleep at night when a gust of wind opens a high window. Afraid at all the commotion Mary gets up and starts to pray. As she prays, we see her face change and her body bend over. With tears in her eyes, Mary looks up through the window to the moonlit sky and simply says, “Yes.” The swirling wind dies down at once.

In recent years successive popes have reminded us that the best devotion to Mary is one that leads us to do what she did: say “yes” to Jesus. Mary is not a stop on our journey of faith; she is a guidepost that always sends us on to Christ. Mary does not save us, for we believe she needed to be saved by Christ as well. That's why she could say yes in the first place. Mary recognized the gift and the giver and became the bearer of God for the world.

In this final week of Advent let's keep reminding ourselves of this simple but life-changing fact: Jesus saves us. Jesus saves us from death. Jesus saves us from living lives devoid of purpose and meaning and Jesus saves us from ourselves.

We don't save ourselves. We cannot earn salvation by good works or prayers or penance. And, as difficult as it is to hear, we cannot save anyone else. That includes our children, spouse, grandchildren, parents, or friends.

Our prayers, good works and faith are the responses we make to the salvation of Christ we claim here and now. And how we live is the way by which those we love will find the gift of God's salvation for themselves.

In the midst of this frantic final week before Christmas when so many other things can distract us from what this grace-filled feast is really all about, let's take a moment to join Mary in accepting into our lives and hearts the greatest of all gifts—our undeserved salvation, Jesus Christ the Lord.

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