

CRIBB<S>NOTE – DECEMBER 21, 2008

The familiar story of the Angel Gabriel's visit to the Virgin Mary never ceases to astound readers. The encounter is full of unexpected statements. There are no questions asked between Gabriel and Mary. It is correctly called "The Annunciation," because Gabriel announces to the young woman God's plan for her life. And she doesn't respond with any questions, except to ask 'how could this be' since she has not been with a man. After that, she settles into a state of acceptance; perhaps submission or obedience to the otherwise, incredible news.

But, of course, those of us who read to catch up with the remarkable events proclaimed by the heavenly being bring our own multitude of questions; even those without answers. We don't just have questions for or about Mary, but mothers everywhere.

It is not lost on us that angelic visitation took place in a back water region in a small town. It occurred with a character who had no previous record of success or great accomplishments. In fact, she was unwed in a traditional society that shunned any conduct that would bring "shame" on a family or community. Unwed pregnancy might appear at the top of the list of undesirable conduct.

We are also aware that Mary falls into a category that is quite familiar to most of us today. Unwed mothers of sons have a high statistical record of seeing their boys carted off to prison. Mary fit that group as well as her son was accused, convicted, and executed for crimes against the state. We may ask one glaring question, "Where is the Good News in a story that leads to pain and suffering?"

Is Mary the feminine counter-part to Job who endured great distress in a cosmic contest between Divine and satanic forces? Our questions flow like a fountain as we engage the conversation between the Angel and the Virgin. There are questions we ask of ourselves.

How would we respond to God's call to bring new life of salvation and liberation to the world? What does it mean to be "highly favored and blessed?" Do mothers today give birth to Christ?

The very dangers of child-bearing pose no less threat to mothers and infants in these times of modern medicine. The heartache of loss and human suffering has not ebbed. Mary becomes the embodiment of every mother who knows unbearable pain; the loss of a child; the incarceration, alienation, and separation when the fruit of her womb is removed from society.

The familiar story remains mysterious and wonderful as its undefined conclusion continues even through this generation. We anticipate the coming of Christ. God's love for us has not diminished. We have not been excluded from God's Promise.

Somehow in her youth and innocence, Mary had an understanding beyond her age. She was filled with holiness that opened her soul to receive God. She is our model of goodness, hope, joy, and love. When we think of Mary and all she came to know, we find an unconquerable peace. Her baby is our Savior: God's Promise of joy to the world.