

Advent IV - Peace



You Will Need

Colored paper
Scissors
Markers
Stapler, glue, or tape

Disclaimer

Before you begin, you should know that Advent is my favorite season of the church year. This is partly because I love Mary and during Advent we get to talk about Mary. This means we are in my happy place this week – it is all about Mary! I believe the Protestant church has long ignored and misrepresented a very important person in Scripture. In my work, I seek to begin undoing that wrong.



This week, the fourth and final week of Advent, we are going to look more closely at the person of Mary. The image to the left is a traditional image of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Looking at the image and remembering what you have read in Scripture, what do you know about Mary. How would you describe her?

This piece is entitled “The Virgin in Prayer” by Sassoferrato (1609-1685), an Italian painter. There will be many other images of Mary in these pages. They will look quite different from this very traditional painting of Mary.

Light the fourth Advent candle, the candle representing PEACE

Read Luke 1:26-38

²⁶ When Elizabeth was six months pregnant, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a city in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin who was engaged to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David’s house. The virgin’s name was Mary. ²⁸ When the angel came to her, he said, “Rejoice, favored one! The Lord is with you!” ²⁹ She was confused by these words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰ The angel said, “Don’t be afraid, Mary. God is honoring you. ³¹ Look! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² He will be great and he will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of David his father. ³³ He will rule over Jacob’s house forever, and there will be no end to his kingdom.”

³⁴ Then Mary said to the angel, “How will this happen since I am a virgin?”

³⁵ The angel replied, “The Holy Spirit will come over you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the one who is to be born will be holy. He will be called God’s Son. ³⁶ Look, even in her old age, your relative Elizabeth has conceived a son. This woman who was labeled ‘unable to conceive’ is now six months pregnant. ³⁷ Nothing is impossible for God.”

³⁸ Then Mary said, “I am the Lord’s servant. Let it be with me just as you have said.” Then the angel left her.



A Little About Mary

Look at the verses 26 & 27 again. Where did God send the angel Gabriel? To what town and where? How old do you think Mary might have been?

Nazareth, located in the region of Galilee, was a tiny town. It was not an impressive city or anywhere anyone wanted to visit. It was just a town in the middle of nowhere. It was also a poor town so Mary would have been poor as well.

If you guessed that Mary was young, you were right. She was engaged but not yet married. It is likely her father would have arranged the marriage but while she was engaged, she was still living at home with her family, learning how to tend to a home and care for a family. She would not move to her husband's home for a full year and only after a week-long wedding celebration.

Artwork by Anthony VanArsdale for the National Black Catholic Congress

One more important detail: Do you remember what her religion would have been?

Mary was Jewish and she was living in a poor tiny town in a land that was run by the wealthy Roman Empire. She was not important and would not have been known by anyone outside her family and small town. As a woman, she would have had almost no power at all. She would have tended to the home and supported her family and other women. She was not a person who could make things happen or change rules.

Favored One

Now, knowing what you do about Mary, look at the Scripture text carefully and answer these questions:

- When the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, what was his greeting?
- She was confused by his greeting. Why do you think she was confused? *(There are a lot of reasons she was confused, including some related to what you read above. Make a list of all the reasons she might have been confused. Feel free to imagine how you would feel and include those reasons.)*
- After Mary recovered from her shock, what did the angel tell Mary about herself? *(You should be able to list four things.)*
- What did the angel tell Mary about the son she would bear?
- Again, Mary was confused. Why was she confused about having a baby?



Mary & the Angel in Japanese art

Gabriel tells Mary that the baby she will carry will be holy because he will be the Son of God. She will not get pregnant as other women get pregnant. Instead, God will make this all happen for her. Mary must have looked confused again (wouldn't you?!) so the angel told her that her cousin, Elizabeth, who was considered too old to have a baby, was six months pregnant. "Nothing is impossible with God!" the angel said. What was Mary's response to all of this? What did she say? Can you say it in your own words?

Meek & Mild vs. Strong & Courageous

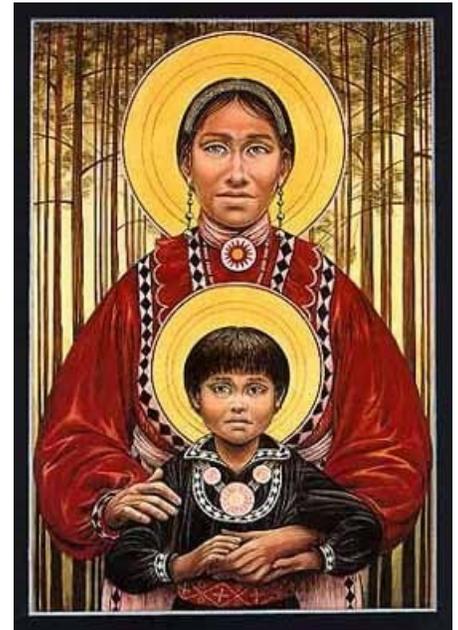
Mary has often been portrayed as gentle and quiet. She is seen as one who is obedient and willing to do whatever was asked of her.

However, there is another way to see Mary.

How might we understand this poor unmarried young girl who just agreed to be pregnant before she got married? Does this sound like a good idea if you want to impress your future husband? What do you think her husband and father would have said?

The church has taught us that Mary was a woman who did what she was told to do. Others (including myself) suggest that Mary made a brave and bold decision to carry the baby. She said yes. She was the one who made the decision.

Why do you think it is important whether or not Mary simply did as she was told or made up her own mind? Which one gives Mary power? If Mary is seen as a role model for women, why is it important that she made the decision to participate?



Choctaw Virgin Mother & Child
by Fr. John Giuliani

God Works with Human Beings

One of the incredible things about this story is that God came to Mary through the angel Gabriel and invited her to be part of something amazing. God chose to work with a human person to bring Jesus into the world. Mary was part of the team, so to speak. God needed her and depended on her, just as Mary needed and depended on God. Mary could have said “no” but she decided to say “yes.” She decided to be a part of this new thing that God was doing. Can you think of other times in the Bible that God worked with human beings to make things happen (if you get stumped, consider the Old Testament!)?



Mary & Elizabeth by Lauren Wright Pittman

We are working to do our part to save and protect the Monarch butterfly and other important pollinators like the honeybee.

What does the angel Gabriel tell Mary about God?
What is possible with God?

If this is true, then why doesn't God simply fix the problem and save the monarchs for us? That would make things a lot easier! But what do we know about the way God works in the world? Who does God work with and through?

Nothing is impossible with God but we have to take part and play a role. If Mary had said “no,” the story would be very different. If we do not do our part, it is unlikely we can save the monarch. But, if we do our part and with God's help, all things are possible.



The Nativity by He Qi, a Chinese born American artist



A painting in the Brooklyn Mythology series by Tim Okamura



Mary & Jesus Modern Icon by Gracie Morbitzer

Peace & Mary

Mary was a strong and powerful woman. Not in the ways we usually think of power. She was a poor unmarried mother, after all. In her country, she had no real power to change anything, but still, she was the one chosen by God. When the angel Gabriel asked Mary to take part, God was showing Mary that she was loved and respected.

Peace comes when we understand that we are loved by God and that means everyone else is loved by God too—all people, even the ones who are nothing like us. That can be hard to wrap our heads around. God loves those with whom we do not get along. Can you think of some people like that in your life—people you do not really like or get along with?

Peace can only happen when we respect others and try to understand them. It comes when we care about ourselves, others, and the world. Peace comes through love, which is what Mary was given by God, and then gave to the world.

Mary in Art

The pieces of art on these pages were selected because they do not look like the nativity scenes in our homes nor the images of Mary we usually see at church or around town. Take a moment and look at all the images.

Which is your favorite? Why do you like it?

How is it different from other images of Mary you have seen?

Why do you think it is important that we see images of Mary in which she is not pale and white?

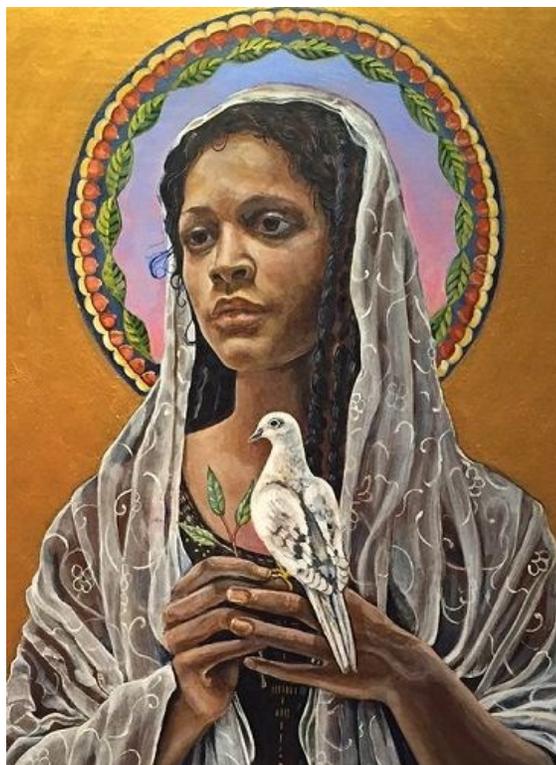
Advent Week IV Project— Peace Prayer Chains

This week you are invited to create a family peace prayer chain as a way to pray for peace for yourself, others, and the world.

To create your peace prayer chain:

- Cut inch or inch and a half strips of colored paper. You may want to make your chain red and green, or all white, or rainbow. Pick the colors you want to use and cut out at least five strips for each member of your family.
- Write a prayer, name, place, situation, or draw a picture of something or someone for which you want to pray on a strip of paper. Do not forget your own name!
- Use one strip of paper per prayer or name or place.
- Be sure to include someone with whom you disagree or someone you do not really like—we are called to pray for them as well if we want to know and bring peace.
- Write or draw as many names and situations as you are able.
- Make a circle with one strip and glue, tape, or staple it.
- Begin linking each strip of paper making a long paper chain.
- You may use these prayers to decorate your tree or drape around your door frames. Put them somewhere you will see them to remind you of your desire and prayers for peace. May they also remind you to pray for all people. Remember, peace happens when we respect, seek to understand, honor, and care for all people, even those who are different.
- Consider placing the supplies near the chains so you can add people, places, and situations throughout the coming weeks.

Take a picture of your peace prayer chain or chains and send it to Sally or Jim. If you are willing, we would like to share a picture of your prayer chains on the church website.



Black Madonna by Sue Ellen Parkinson

Resources:

He Qi at <https://www.heqiart.com/>

Tim Okamura at <https://www.timokamura.com/>

Gracie Morbitzer at <https://www.themodernsaints.com/>

Sue Ellen Parkinson at <https://www.sueellenparkinson.com/>