

FREEDOM TO ACCEPT GOD'S PLAN

Readings: Isaiah 7:10-14, 8:10; Luke 1: 26-38

Both of our readings speak of the offer of a sign from God; both of them promise that a son will be born. But, in reality, the two events could not have been more different.

Ahaz refused to ask for a sign. It wasn't that he trusted in God so much that he didn't *need* one. It was that he trusted in God so little that he didn't *want* one. He had already decided what he was going to do. He was going to put his trust in the Assyrians and he didn't want anyone, even God, to interfere with his plans. Maybe he was so afraid that he wasn't prepared to risk listening to God. He reached out and grasped the first concrete help he could find.

Whatever his reason his decision actually ended up with him becoming subject to the Assyrians. He thought he was defending his independence but instead he became utterly dependent on the King of Assyria. He chased after security and prosperity where they were not to be found.

Mary on the other hand chooses to depend on God: "I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let what you have said be done to me."



The paradox is that by choosing to be a servant, she became free. She agreed to become what God had planned for her. She agreed to allow the Holy Spirit, the power of the Most High, to overshadow her. She opened herself to receive the gift of God.

That's what our freedom is for – so that we can freely choose to accept the loving plan of God for us. And that plan offers a fulfilment of our hopes far beyond what we could ever have imagined.

But God's plan, is sometimes painful and frightening – Mary was deeply disturbed, the Gospel tells us. Very often that plan leads us along paths we would never have chosen for ourselves. Very often it leads us along paths which, like Ahaz, we are frightened to take. But it is a plan that leads us to a happiness which eye has not seen nor ear heard.

There is a lot of Ahaz in each of us. We see him every time we place our trust in something that is not God – in our own ingenuity, in what we own, in the plans we have laid out for ourselves. When we meet disappointment and sorrow it seems like an unmitigated disaster. If things don't work out as we planned, all is lost!

In the Blessed Virgin we see the real greatness of freedom – to welcome the Kingdom of God rather than trying to build our own empire. It was a costly welcome. A sword would pierce her heart. She would stand and watch her son die a cruel and unjust death.

The Holy Spirit began to renew the face of the earth when Mary consented to become the Mother of God. That same Holy Spirit has been poured into our hearts and is still at work

leading us to the risen Jesus. The answer to every human hope, the fulfilment of the deepest human longings is found in him. Our hearts are restless until they rest in him.

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