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Sebastian A. Falcone
St. John Fisher College

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A Message from Heaven for a Teen-Ager

A MESSAGE FROM HEAVEN FOR A TEEN-AGER

Dr. Rev. Sebastian A. Falcone

Isa 7:10-14; 8:10 Ps 40:7-8a, 8b-9, 10-11 Heb10:4-10 Jn 1:14ab Lk 1:26-38

Just a teenager.

She is thirteen. Just crossed the teen-age threshold.

For a year she has been betrothed to Nazareth's most skilled craftsman – a teknon (cf. Mt 13:55 – an industrious hand-laborer carefully selected for her by her father as a marriage partner.

She is neither too short nor too tall for her age. Her upper lip curls slightly upward – a sign of determination, a hint of resoluteness for one perceptive enough to decipher the drive of a determined Semitic teen-ager.

The muscles in her arms are hard knots, ready, willing, and able to loft the water jar filled from the village well each evening. Solid lines define her calves, shielding power and skill to gather the kindling – however scarce wherever it may lie – in field of forest-edge, for the common oven at the village edge.

Her hair is almost black – folded into a single braid along her arching back as long as she can recall. The weight of those locks lifts her chin making her seem a might taller than she actually is. Never bend under the burden you carry, she has been told. Root into the ground, surge out of it, stretch up toward the sky, add inches to your stature – and your backbone will lift to each task. Let your posture meet the challenge of each new day – it's the peasant woman's secret to build each day's strength to each day's task.

No, she does not wear a blue veil or a white shift. A thin linen dress drapes her, torn as it is from snagging on sharp-edged rocks and thorn clumps as she chases a wayward lamb or two. Even the patches are shredding and the original black has yielded to a fading grey. She and her girl-cousins wear such non-descript shifts in the sun-baked courtyards. Now is this very hour she has joined her Nazareth friends, and deft fingers are snipping the tips of vegetable that will appear on tonight's supper table.

Occasionally they pause to giggle, as they weave a remembrance of this morning's event or yesterday's encounter. It has been a restless night, but as morning's event or yesterday's encounter. It has been a restless night, but as morning wears on, she feels the need to head home. Taking leave of her friends, she lofts the water pitcher on her head and takes the path to her parent' one-room abode.

Miriam

Her name is Miriam – a name whose sounds clings to the curl of the lips. A name so common in this place that if you call it, one of every three women is likely to answer. In the ritual language of her people she proudly bears the name of Moses' sister – the vivacious priestess who led the Israelites in song after crossing the Red Sea in their meandering towards the open desert.

The Latin form of her name, Maria, will await at least another four centuries. The form the Catholic Church will favor and by which virtually the whole world will come to tell her story, more unique than singular.

Even later, in the English-speaking world, ten centuries will slip by before she will be called Mariamne – the name of King Herod's most favored wife.

In Coptic the third century Gnostic gospels will call her Mariham.

In the eighth century, the only sura (=chapter) featuring a woman in the whole of the Koran, she will be named Maryam.

Here, then, this wispy, vivacious teen-ager, winding her way home this day at noon suspects nothing of the wonder that awaits her. Knows nothing of the mystery that unfurls before her. She is simply a Galilean teen-ager floating on the wisp of this moment.

A psalm – one she favors, Psalm 95, spontaneously surges to her lips. Its words pulse to the rhythm. Of her teen-age heart. Her legs catch the rhythm of the water swirling at the rim of the clay pot that rides on her head.

... Let us sing to the Lord...
O come, let us worship and bow down...
O that today you would listen to his voice!

“His voice... his voice!” The word reverberates through her teen-age frame.

Soon she enters the walled arena that surrounds her parents' humble abode. The resonance of that one word lingers in ecstatic reverberation: “O that today you would hear his voice...his voice... his voice.”

And she dared to add a bold thought to the psalmist's sweet song.

O that today you might welcome the wonder of his voice.

As she crosses the threshold of her parents' home, a sudden splendor catches her eye. The interior darkness shatters under the incredible radiance.

And there – amid the silence of the one-room home, young Miriam hears a reassuring invitation: “Do not be afraid, O highly favored one!”

In this mystery-laden noon-hour, it is neither angel nor teen-ager who dominate. It is all-gracious God of Israel – the mystery of the divine presence that dominates. The moment is made for the infinite depth, the eternal Presence of the All-Holy One!

Time and eternity embrace in this moment of infinite mystery.

Mary trembles. The promise of the psalm has engulfed her.

Though not yet married, she is betrothed. Long-standing custom has stipulated that the marriage-to-be be overseen by her father. She would live at home for a year following the betrothal. Then the groom, Joseph, would come to take her to his home. And the marriage festivities would last an entire week.

Speaking to her innate fears, the messenger assures Mary she has found favor – unrestricted favor – with God. And then in a staggering annunciation she – the Galilean teen-ager – is told she will conceive a child – a child who will not violate her virginity. A child who is nothing less than God's Son and hers. His name is be Jesus – Yeshuah.

The words that follow plunge her into wonder. Like a seed, the word burrows into her.

The word of consent that arises from her heart becomes a twinge on her lips. She savors the memory of the assurance she has heard. “He will be called the Son of God (v. 32a), Son of the Most High (v. 32), Son of David (v. 32b).”

The moment implodes within her. “Behold the slave of the Lord!”

She has surrendered to the impact of eternity. She does not lend herself – she surrenders to the power of the divine invitation.

The ultimate scandal is that God, through her word, crosses the threshold of human life and faces all the depravity, violence, corruption of a broken world.

The moment carries an infinite hope for humankind. Embracing the essential core of the moment, Miriam flesh and blood embraces the invitation to become the teen-aged mother of God's only begotten Son.

Her consent is an acquiescence to take part in God's mysterious plan to repair our broken world.

History will enshrine her as healer, teacher, wonder-worker, icon. But in this moment engulfed by divine mystery, her consent reverberates with total abandon”

“Here I am, the slave of the Lord.
Let it be done to me as you have announced.”

