

December 7, 2025 Advent Sunday Worship Sermon
"Mary's Song" Pastor Takaaki Inoue
Luke 1:26-38, Luke 1:46-55

① 【The Virgin Birth】

The angel Gabriel came to Mary and said, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus." (verse 31) This is the famous "Annunciation." Mary was betrothed to Joseph but had not yet gone to live with him, so "How can this be? I have not known a man," she said. Gabriel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. Even your relative Elizabeth is pregnant with a son in her old age, though she was said to be barren. Nothing is impossible with God." (1:35-37). Mary was said to be about fifteen years old at the time. The story of Elizabeth, an elderly woman who had been barren, becoming pregnant must have given her courage. The devotion of senior believers encourages the younger believers around them. How should we interpret a virgin conceiving a child? Father Thomas Hopko writes:

● Only God can save the world. Humans alone cannot do it. For it is humanity itself that needs saving. ...The virgin birth is not the result of idolizing virginity, nor is it because sexuality is considered unclean, nor is it to add luster to Jesus' moral teachings. The virgin birth signifies that the One born could not possibly be merely human like all other humans who need salvation. ...The Savior who came to save the world could not possibly be "of this world."

I am not particularly surprised that a virgin could conceive. God created all things. When God created the heavens and the earth, He took dust from the virgin earth and breathed the Holy Spirit into it to create the first human. At the end of the world, God used the virgin Mary as His virgin earth, took flesh, and by the Holy Spirit created a new human. Humanity needed salvation, while God needed a body to live and die with humanity. Mary provided that body. Within her, God and man became one for the first time. Without losing His divinity, He became fully human, and the entirely new being, the God-man Jesus Christ, was born. Every time I contemplate this, I am filled with astonishment and profound emotion. An unimaginable creation took place. God and man entered into an eternal marriage. From this moment onward, Jesus would never shed this humanity He received. God now shares destiny with humanity in this way. "The two shall become one flesh" was thus perfectly fulfilled.

② 【May it be so, as you have said】

Mary said, "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me according to your word" (verse 38). Never have I heard such beautiful words of human devotion. God sought

Mary's consent in carrying out the work of salvation. God's salvation is accomplished through a joint effort: "God's initiative" and "human response through free will." Mary's conception is our prototype. Long ago, Christ dwelt within Mary's womb through her consent; now, through our consent, Christ is born within us. Long ago, Mary's flesh became Christ; now, our flesh becomes Christ. Long ago, Christ worked outside of you; now, He works within you.

This phrase, "Let it be done to me according to your word," is the same as the prayer we routinely recite in the Lord's Prayer: "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." We are praying for God's will to be done upon us. Every day, we are reciting such an incredible "prayer of surrender."

● Sister Kazuko Watanabe writes this: "Taking religious vows is like signing at the very bottom of a blank sheet of paper. It means that whatever is written on the upper part of this blank sheet from now on is acceptable."

God calls us not because He cannot accomplish salvation without our help, but to show us His salvation, to make us witnesses of it, and to give us glory. To become a Christian is to be called to a glorious work.

③ **【My soul magnifies the Lord】**

Mary visited her relative Elizabeth and sang a hymn of praise: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has done great things for me." (Verses 47-48) This "magnify" is called 'Magnificat' in Latin, meaning "to make great." Therefore, this hymn means "My soul magnifies the Lord." It signifies that within me, my own self grows smaller while God grows larger. My own deeds seem insignificant, while what God has done appears immense—this fills me with joy and compels me to praise God. Mary said, "For he has looked with favor on his lowly servant" (verse 48). A newborn baby follows its mother's dark eyes. Through this, it learns it is a being being watched and finds reassurance. Mary too felt the gaze of God remembering and loving her. Elizabeth told Mary, "Blessed is she who believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her" (Luke 1:45). But it is not kinship that is truly blessed; it is having faith that is the real blessing.

After this, Mary, Jesus' mother, and his brothers left their hometown of Nazareth to join Jesus on his itinerant ministry, indicating they became his disciples. At the time of Pentecost, Mary and the brothers were also among the disciples. Furthermore, when Jesus' brother James became the overseer of the Jerusalem church, Mary is thought to have been at the center of the church, playing a significant role in its formation. Tradition holds that she fled the Jewish War of 70 CE and moved to Ephesus with the Apostle John, spending her later years there and dying in Ephesus. Yet, reading the Gospels, it is truly puzzling how little is said about Mary afterward. There is no mention of Peter or Paul visiting her. As the mother of the Savior, she might have been given special treatment, yet there is no mention of such at all. I believe Mary's greatness lies in never losing that initial

humility throughout her life. The Orthodox Church revered Mary as the “Theotokos” (God-bearer), honoring her as the woman who gave birth to Christ. However, it is decreed that when depicting her in icons, Mary must never be portrayed alone; she must always be depicted alongside Christ. For apart from Christ, there is no glory. Mary's greatness lies in her having become an instrument of God.

●The life of Nijima Yae was featured in an NHK historical drama, but there was another woman from the same Aizu domain named Ibuka Yae. She graduated from Doshisha Girls' School (now Doshisha Women's College) and worked as an English teacher in Nagasaki. However, in the summer of her 22nd year, suspected of having Hansen's disease, she was isolated and admitted to Koyama Rehabilitation Hospital. She reportedly contemplated suicide many times, overwhelmed by despair after losing her status and everything else. Koyama Rehabilitation Hospital was run by Father Lézeau as its director, but the only doctor was the priest himself, and there were no nurses. Relatively mild patients cared for those with more severe conditions. About a year after her admission, not only did her symptoms fail to worsen, but her skin had become clear. Upon examination, it was determined she did not have Hansen's disease but a temporary skin condition. Father Lézeau told her, "Now that we know you do not have Hansen's disease, there is no reason for you to remain here. Please think carefully about your future and live your own life." Yae replied, "I will earn my qualifications and become a nurse at this hospital." She became a nurse. Despite the strong discrimination and prejudice against Hansen's disease at the time, she devoted herself as head nurse and dedicated her life to the relief of Hansen's disease patients. Regarding her misdiagnosis, she stated, "My being here is a blessing. I am grateful that God gave me this place." The Bible verse Yaebumi Yaebumi held as her motto was: "Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds" (John 12:24). She was called home to heaven at the age of 91. Her tomb bears the inscription: "A Single Grain of Wheat."

Devotion means dying to oneself. It means not trying to live one's own life or existence, but entrusting it completely to God and allowing God to give life. Here lies the humble and beautiful form of humanity. Mary's beauty lies in this complete devotion. We too wish to pray, "Let it be done to me according to your word."