

**My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,**

**As they prepared for their recent Pageant, our young thespians in the Early Learning Center were getting dressed in their costumes. One of the first dressed in his white tunic and white headdress with black flappy ears was a little 4 year old named Raymond. He was mightily proud of himself and careened around the room, shouting, “I’m a sheep!” He approached little Olivia, proudly proclaiming, “I’m a sheep! What are you?” With her little braided gold halo pinned on and her wings about to be attached, she said, “I’m an angel!”**

**Unimpressed, Raymond continued to cavort, and came upon a beautiful little girl named Claire. Again he proudly announced his sheepedness. Then asked, “What are you?” Claire sweetly smiled and said, “I’m the Virgin Mary!”**

**Realizing that he was face to face with a lead character, Raymond felt a need to justify his own role. With all the seriousness of a 4-year old, Raymond said, “It’s hard being a sheep, you know.”**

**“Yes,” Claire replied innocently, “but it’s also hard being a virgin, you know!”**

**Indeed it is hard to be a virgin. Imagine being a 13 or 14 year old, being visited by an angel named Gabriel who tells you that it pleases God that you become pregnant and bear a son whose name will be Jesus.**

**Think about what you were doing when you were 13 or 14 years old, or what you hope to be doing when you turn 13 or 14 years old. I don’t think becoming pregnant and becoming a mother would make it into anyone’s top ten aspirations.**

**At first, fearful; then questioning; Mary ultimately says, “Yes! I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.”**

**It is the amazing story of the most momentous event to take place in the history of the world. It is an absurd story. It is a story that challenges belief. Even some Catholics smirk when they talk about it, as if this was the only story that Mary and Joseph could come up with to explain this inconvenient pregnancy. But this is what we believe.**

**God came to earth at Christmas! From his birth to his baptism to his death on the cross, in Jesus Christ, God walked the dusty roads of what we now call Israel and Palestine so that He might experience what it means to be human; what it means to have a family and friends; what it means to laugh and love and cry and be hurt; what it means to work and to suffer and to face death.**

**In the play *GREEN PASTURES*, playwright Marc Connelly created this moving and memorable scene. God is anxiously looking out over the parapets of heaven, trying to decide what to do with the sinful situations on earth. Gabriel approaches with his horn tucked under his arm. Sensing God’s dilemma, he brushes his lips across the trumpet to keep the feel of it and asks, “Lord, has the time come for me to blow the trumpet?”**

**“No, no,” says God, “don’t touch the trumpet. Not yet!” God continues to worry. He is hurt and discouraged, even disgusted, by what he sees.**

**Gabriel asks the Lord again, what He plans to do. Will he send someone to tend to the situation? “You’ve already sent Abraham and Isaac, Moses and David, the prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel,, and the other prophets. Is it time to send one of them back? What do you think, Lord?”**

**Without looking at Gabriel, God said, “I am not going to send anyone. This time, I am going Myself?”**

**Of course, that is what God did. In Jesus Christ, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. But, why? What is the meaning of it all?**

**Soren Kierkegaard, the great Danish philosopher and theologian, explained the miracle of Christmas with a parable.**

**Once upon a time there lived a king who loved a poor maiden. This king was an all-powerful King. He could choose any maiden in his kingdom for his bride. But the maiden did not know the king or suspect his love for her. This posed a problem for the king. He knew if he approached her as the king, she would be awed by the differences between them. She might admire him for his power and status, but she could not forget that he was the king and that she was but a humble maiden. Because he truly loved her the king wanted her to love him for himself, not his power. The king considered the possibility of somehow secretly elevating the maiden to the rank of a princess. Then, they would be equals. But he quickly realized the foolishness of such an approach. She would see through his deception. And if she did not, he feared the transformation might alter her character. And he loved her as she was.**

**The king grieved. How could he help his beloved to understand him as he wished to be understood, as a lover rather than a king? Finally, the way became clear. If their union could not be effected through the maiden's elevation to the king, it must be attempted through the king's descent to the maiden. The king realized he must appear in the likeness of a servant, as one humble enough to serve her. So, he clothed himself in a beggar's cloak and went out to meet the maiden. Did she accept his love? What do you think?**

**An angel appears to a virgin, and tells her that she will give birth to a child who "will be called Son of the Most High". This was God's way of seeking to embrace humanity in His love. God would humble Himself and live among us so that we might come to know His true nature. God had no desire to overpower us, but more than anything he wanted to enter into a loving relationship with us.**

**Thus, he chose the young virgin, Mary, through whom He would take on human flesh. It was Mary's "Yes" to God that has transformed the world. So it is that all generations continue to call her blessed.**

**Mary is blessed because she was obedient to God's Will for her. Blessed, as it occurs three times in Luke's account of Mary, is a strong word in Greek. It speaks of God's gracious goodwill and enormous love of a person.**

**Do you want a blessing from God? This is the secret! Mary's secret, if you will! Be totally obedient to God's will for your life and you will be blessed. Blessedness, however, doesn't mean your life will be easy.**

**Mary's life was anything but easy. She gave birth in a stable; had to flee for her life to Egypt; make her home in Nazareth, far from family and friends; watched her Son grow and do good, only to be unjustly condemned, tortured, and killed.**

**Yet Mary never stopped saying "Yes" to God. "Yes, Lord, yes, to your will and to your way. Yes, Lord, yes! In all things Yes"!**

**So it is even to this day, more than 2,000 years later, we pray, greeting her as Gabriel did, asking her, in her blessedness, for her intercession:**

**Hail Mary, full of grace! The Lord is with thee! Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus! Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now, and at the hour of our death. Amen.**