



The Parish Churches of S Philip and S Augustine and S Matthew with S Mary the Virgin Newcastle

Homily for the Conception of the BVM (8th December) 2025

The feast of the Our Lady's Conception presents us with an interesting question about the nature of vocation. Very often people speak of the call to discipleship in terms of God, as it were, contemplating His Purpose and searching around for suitable people to further the plan. However, the implication of our Mariology - the theology of Mary's role - is that, in fact, people are made from the outset for the part that God would have them play.

Yet, at the same time, that God has made us for a particular task or responsibility does not mean that we shall inevitably respond to His call. On the feast of the Annunciation, we recall Mary's *Fiat mihi* - "Be it unto me according to Thy Word." Of course, her words might signify nothing more than a pious submission to the inevitable; but we usually infer that she had the freedom to decline the part that God was inviting her to play in the working out of His Will; and clergy of my acquaintance have occasionally entertained themselves asking what God would have done if Mary had said, "No."

It follows from this that there are two strands to Christian vocation: first, there is the work of the divine in creating us - by innate character and circumstances of life - for discipleship; and, secondly, there is our assent to participate in the unfolding of God's Purpose; and when we contemplate what we perceive to be the urging of God in a particular situation in the context of the knowledge that this might be a responsibility for which God has created us.

There is a hymn, which we do not sing here, which starts by stating that, "Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide in the strife of truth with falsehood for the good or evil side." One of the reasons we do not sing it is that if we were to turn those lines into a question, the answer would be, "Yes and no."

The decision to embrace the identity of a Christian person can be an often is a one-off choice: many people - though perhaps fewer than was once the case - pursue their embrace of discipleship throughout the rest of their lives: they go to Mass and the teaching of Christ influences the character of their lives.

Equally, along the path of that discipleship we encounter moments where particular choices present themselves: choices which require of us to step outside the congenial and the familiar: situations, which we did not foresee when we decided that we would take up our cross and follow Christ.

Mary will surely have encountered several such moments as the years of her Motherhood passed. The Gospel narratives suggest that the years of Jesus' incarnate Ministry were not always easy for Mary and, of course, the criminal's execution would have been a moment of public shame for her. Never-the-less, at the Annunciation she had set her hand to the plough, she did not look back: she was warned in the early years of her Motherhood of the pain that her role would entail; and it was for this that she was made by God;

There is a line of Christian preaching, which speaks of discipleship in terms of becoming the people God has made us to be. When we are confronted with the inconvenient and uncongenial implications of our vocation, we should reflect that these are moments for which God created us and when we waver, we should reflect on the consequences of us saying, "No."