



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

Homily for Lady Day (25th March) 2025

When we describe someone as impulsive, there are usually undertones of criticism to our observation. Such a person, we suppose, acts without thought for the consequences, is reckless and risks damage if not to others, then to himself ...

... and yet, this is not always a fair assessment. People who entered into acts of extreme courage often recall that they did not think about what they were doing, they just rushed in to do what they did.

This challenges us to reflect that sometimes we can be overly cautious, dwelling too long on the possible consequences of a course of action, even falling into inertia as we contemplate the risks that we might be taking - no matter how remote.

Impulsive people might well argue that they act and then contend with collateral impact of what they have done: they set their hand to the plough and then find a way through the resulting problems, which arise. They might also suggest that at least sometimes we have to break through the constraints of conventional wisdom and the dictates of caution if we are not to find ourselves increasingly immobilised by stasis.

It is through this lens that we might view the events of the Annunciation, which we celebrate today. Mary is depicted as offering an instantaneous assent to the message of the Angel Gabriel. She did not weigh up the pros and cons of the odyssey on which she was embarking, but simply acquiesced in the divine Will.

As the years rolled on, she - with Joseph - would have to face the consequences of that choice. There will, doubtless, have been challenges; but through them all Mary and Joseph found a way.

We might reflect that this impulsiveness on Mary's part was an essential element as the divine Purpose broke out of the stasis into which it had become constrained in a flawed conventional wisdom. In a sense, the Renewed Covenant broke out from the Old rather than simply emerged from it.

There is, of course, another proposition lurking in the narrative of the Annunciation: that Mary's impulse was divinely inspired: the voice of God prompting her to embrace the role for which she had been born.

Of course, not every human impulse is rooted in God's Will. It is for this reason that we do not just throw caution to the wind. The problem, of course, is to know when an impulse comes from God and when it is actually just a reckless whim. It is a facet of the sanctification of our lives that we learn to discern which is which.

Mary, of course, was very young when the Angel approached her. She was precocious in her sanctity of life - so self-assuredly recognising the voice of God when she heard it. This was why she was hailed as blessed amongst women: as we routinely remember, God had been with her in a unique way from the moment of her own conception, aligning her impulses with His Will.