



SUNDAY 24 DECEMBER 2023

DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

**The Parishes of:** Bishop Auckland || Newton Aycliffe & Shildon || Willington  
Crook, Tow Law & Wolsingham || Tudhoe || Coundon, Ferryhill & Windlestone

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## ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

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### **4th Sunday of Advent (B): Luke 1: 26-38**

Ever had the experience of meeting outstanding people and been surprised to discover what's really outstanding is how human and ordinary they really are?

The Hebrew Scriptures - what we know as the Old Testament - presents us with powerful images of God. Almighty and demanding as well as faithful and compassionate. Images of royal courts, immense entourage and the trappings of excess, created pictures of power and a special regard for the chosen people. The Messiah, the anointed one God was to send, assumed seeming unassailable political prowess.

The truth turned out to be even more outlandish, beyond impressions of good sense yet shatteringly brilliant in its simplicity. Approaching an early teenager in a nondescript village not only to conceive outside of marriage and carry the stigma for always, but the child will be the Son of God made possible without human agency and by the power of God's Spirit. You couldn't make it up.

Nazareth's small population would carry no torch for Mary or for Joseph either. Does it take the idealism of youth, the big hearted embrace of novel adventure and commitment after Gabriel's reassurance for this story to progress past the first page? Acceptance out of duty may have marked many a pregnancy, but the implications of Mary's yes to God's invitation is nothing short of serious open-ended faith.

We can and do speculate with wonder and devotion about what Our Lady is like and especially about her age and disposition at the time of the Annunciation. It's tempting to compare today's youngsters of equivalent age and be mesmerised by what God chose to do. Showing his love and bonding with his people is powerfully expressed by becoming one of them and sharing their lives even to an extreme death is mind-bending. How you do such a thing, when and with whom become questions of immense importance and detail. We may wish we had more detail. The point seems to be that we have enough of what we need and should continue to study the consequences.

Jesus repeats throughout the four Gospels that he has come to do his Father's will, that his mother did the same and that you and I are called to follow suit. The Lord's Prayer is a clear statement of the thinking Jesus wants us to adopt. The unfolding and living out of Mary's Yes to God not only expresses the demands of her faithfulness but she is gifted to us as the First Apostle and mother of all who put God first and learn in the doing of it. Happy Christmas.



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*Pope Francis on seeing the truth*

*The ethical decadence of real power is disguised thanks to marketing and false information, useful tools in the hands of those with greater resources to employ them to shape public opinion. With the help of these means, whenever plans are made to undertake a project involving significant changes in the environment or high levels of contamination, one raised the hopes of the people of that area by speaking of the local progress that it will be able to generate or of the potential for economic growth, employment and human promotion that it would mean for their children. Yet in reality there does not seem to be any true interest in the future of these people, since they are not clearly told that the project will result in the clearing of their lands, a decline in the quality of their lives, a desolate and less inhabitable landscape lacking in life, the joy of community and hope for the future; in addition to the global damage that eventually compromises many other people as well.*

*One need but think of the momentary excitement raised by the money received in exchange for the deposit of nuclear waste in a certain place. The house that one could have bought with that money has turned into a grave due to the diseases that were then unleashed. And I am not saying this, moved by a overflowing imagination, but on the basis of something we have seen. It could be said that this is an extreme example, but in these cases there is no room for speaking of "lesser" damages, for it is precisely the amassing of damages considered tolerable that has brought us to the situation in which we now find ourselves.*

**- Laudate Deum paras 29 and 30**