

Sunday Sermon - 20.12.20
Delivered by Rev'd Selina McMahon
Sermon for Advent 4

Whenever we are called to carry out any form of activity in virtually any arena of life these days, we are first of all faced with a barrage of forms to complete. When organising such activities for groups (particularly where children are involved) it is essential that we complete a "Risk Assessment". We identify "what could go wrong" and assess its likelihood and the impact if it did. Whereas some things will almost certainly go wrong (a belt of rain on the parish barbecue, for example), their impact isn't that great (soggy sausages warmed up in the oven).

The same is true in sport – some sports are riskier than others. Whereas not many practice such dodgy sports as volcano boarding (think of snowboarding but on a slightly warmer hill), you might be surprised to hear that golf is the tenth most dangerous sport in the world in terms of the number of injuries that occur each year. Even scrabble has its risks!

With all such sports, it is normal to sign some form of documentation stating that you understand the risks involved and exonerating the organisers of any liability should an incident arise or anyone be injured. Even when you are doing something as straightforward as getting a loan there is small print to look into before you sign to make sure you don't end up paying back too much.

But, in many ways, the most difficult job in the world doesn't have any complicated forms or application procedure to complete; nor do you get checked by blue card services even though you do have intimate access with children. Being a parent comes as a shock no matter how well you prepare for it. You don't normally perform a risk analysis before becoming a parent. Perhaps you should – especially from a financial viewpoint since the average cost of bringing up a child in Australia is a staggering \$600,000. As my dad used to say, "Spend your money on anything you like so long as it doesn't eat".

Do people understand what they are getting in to when they have children? Apart from the agony of childbirth, the sleepless nights, the cost and worry, there is also the issue of teaching your children to behave politely and considering others. Growing up, children find their feet and plan their lives – which are often not the way their parents would have liked, but you stand ready to offer support when they need it. Then they leave home and you realise you have no control over them any more.

When Gabriel told Mary she was going to be a mother, there was even more to be worried about. Mary would have to endure the mockery of being an unmarried mother. She would eventually become a widow (Joseph was almost certainly much older than her) and have to bring up her son on her own. She would also see Jesus embark on a dangerous path against the authorities which would eventually lead him to the cross – and on

that day that virtually all deserted him she would stand watching him die. Did she understand what she would be taking on when she agreed to this plan?

I suspect she did. After all, there aren't many people who get their pregnancy announced to them in such an unusual way. There must have been a bit of a hint that this was not going to be a textbook case. And yet, she said "Yes". Just think for a moment about the implications of this simple word – after all she could have said "No". Her life would have been far easier and, let's be honest, how many of us would have even considered saying "yes"? Had she said "no" mankind could well have found itself without a saviour – there's no hint that God had any form of backup plan. This was an example of a high risk, high impact activity. Saying "no" because of the implications involved would have been the most likely result and the consequences of such an answer could hardly have been higher.

Mary could have asked questions about what would be involved. She could have pressed for terms and conditions. She cannot have fully understood what she was expected to do, but she trusted God and believed she wouldn't be let down. She trusted in God for the strength to do what she would have to do. She is an astounding example of faith. "Gentle Mary meek and mild"? - I don't think so. "Warrior Mary, brave and bold" would be a more fitting description.

Do we consider we have such faith that we put all of our trust in God when we are called? – because God does call each one of us. Ok, we are not being called to do what Mary was called for – but that's not to say that the task God has for us isn't important. What is important is our response.

And it was because of Mary's response that we honour her. We don't worship her – worship is for God alone – but we do pay her special honour because she said yes when God put the question to her. We cannot achieve what she did but we can emulate her in our response to God's call. We should also pay total obedience to God.

Had Mary declined the task God had for her; if Christ had not been born, then not only would we not have been preparing for Christmas, we wouldn't have been saved by his love. And that is a story not worth thinking about. Thank God for Jesus. And thank God that Mary said "Yes".