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Philip Yancey is a famous Christian writer. His book, *'The Jesus I Never Knew'* is one of my favourite books. In that book, there is a great explanation of the incarnation of Jesus. Philip gave us his insight into the incarnation of Christ sharing his experience as follows:

I learned about incarnation when I kept a salt-water aquarium. Management of a marine aquarium, I discovered, is no easy task. I had to run a portable chemical laboratory to monitor the nitrate levels and the ammonia content. I pumped in vitamins and antibiotics and sulfa drugs and enough enzymes to make a rock grow. I filtered the water through glass fibers and charcoal, and exposed it to ultraviolet light. You would think, in view of all the energy expended on their behalf, that my fish would at least be grateful. Not so. Every time my shadow loomed above the tank they dove for cover into the nearest shell. They showed me one “emotion” only: fear. Although I opened the lid and dropped in food on a regular schedule, three times a day, they responded to each visit as a sure sign of my designs to torture them. I could not convince them of my true concern. To my fish I was deity. I was too large for them, my actions too incomprehensible. My acts of mercy they saw as cruelty; my attempts at healing they viewed as destruction. To change their perceptions, I began to see, would require a form of incarnation. I would have to become a fish and “speak” to them in a language they could understand. A human being becoming a fish is nothing compared to God becoming a baby.

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The core of Christmas is the incarnation of Jesus; the Word became flesh. The event is the highlight of God’s love for us. Karl Barth argued that it was the climax of God’s revelation and eternal purpose for the reconciliation with human beings.

However, many Christians tend not to be interested in finding deep meanings in it. It provides us fundamental guidelines for how to live as a people of God, but we just think of it as one of the doctrines or an old church legend. To understand the event more deeply we should focus on the way God sent Jesus to the earth. For this, we need to examine some people related to the affair, but this morning, with a time limit, we will talk about only one person, Mary.

In today’s Gospel reading, there is recorded a critical conversation between Mary and the angel Gabriel. The angel told Mary, “You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.” You know, she wasn’t yet married

at this point and having a baby as a virgin wasn't allowed at all at that time; she might have been stoned in public.

Yes, God's plan was dangerous for Mary the virgin. Many theologians have explained that Jesus had to be born of a virgin to be sinless. Then, why did God select Mary among many virgins? There is no record of her personal life in the Bible except that she was the fiancée of Joseph, a descendant of King David, and a relative of Elizabeth who later became the mother of John the Baptist. We don't know her character or background, or her family or social life; she just appears to be one of the ordinary everyday people in those days.

There seems no particular reason or merit in selecting her. Nevertheless, God used Mary as a channel of his amazing scheme. In fact, thinking deeply, this event shows the way God has worked for human beings. Lots of the divine miracles recorded in the Scripture were done by God through ordinary people, or even the weak or the marginalised who were trusting God.

For example, God created the Ten Calamities in Egypt to free his people through Moses who was a fugitive then and parted the Red Sea using his wooden staff. God saved the Israelites from the king of Canaan through Deborah, a weak woman, not a strong warrior. He blessed the kingdom of Judah because of David who was a mere shepherd.

The way that God works manifests clearly who our God is. Our God is personal God; he likes communicating with his people and cooperating with them rather than commanding unilaterally from up there. He prefers working together with us to working alone. He doesn't discriminate against anyone in calling his people to the divine ministry. On top of that, he is always willingly brought down to our level to communicate like parents trying to adapt to their children.

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The incarnation of Jesus was an extension of the way that God has worked, and a great example showing how much God loves us. At this point, we need to focus on the response of Mary who was invited to be a part of God's salvation scheme. When she met the angel Gabriel and heard the Annunciation, she would have been

very shocked or scared at the news. However, in the end, she determined to accept God’s invitation with courage and confidence taking risks in her life.

In verse 38 Mary responded to the angel’s message as follows: “‘I am the Lord’s servant,’ Mary answered. ‘May your word to me be fulfilled.’” With that trust and obedience, Mary could be God’s instrument for the most incredible miracle and became the mother of Christ.

The prophet Isaiah called Christ with another name, *Immanuel*, in his prophecy. Do you remember that I explained the word Immanuel last Christmas season? Immanuel is a Hebrew word consisted of three words. ‘Im’ means ‘with,’ ‘manu’ means ‘us,’ and ‘el’ is “God.” That is, Im-manu-el signifies that God is with us; this is God’s way of restoring human beings.

The narrative of Jesus’ incarnation shows that Mary the mother of Christ was a bridge connecting human beings to God the Immanuel, which is the ultimate purpose of our lives. Not only Mary, but also every one of us is called to make the wonders of Immanuel known to our family and friends, to our neighbours and even strangers in our community and every corner of the world.

But if Mary had objected, God wouldn’t have forced her to obey. Instead, he would have found another person as his instrument; then, the story of Jesus’ incarnation would have been different from what we know now. God has completed his holy plans through those who are willing to participate.

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The event of the incarnation isn’t just one of the Christian doctrines; it teaches powerfully and clearly who our God is, how he works towards saving and reconciling with us, and how we should live as a people of God. What’s remarkable is that Jesus’ incarnation is an on-going event because God’s salvation ministry isn’t finished yet.

God loved the world so much he sent his only son Jesus for us. God still loves the world as much as he did two thousand years ago, so he continues to make his divinity to be found and seen by human beings. Although Jesus might not be born again as a baby, his incarnation will happen in various ways, and it won’t stop until all human beings can be restored.

In this regard, an American theologian Ron Rolheiser argues like this: “The incarnation began with Jesus, and it has never stopped. . . . God takes on flesh so that every home becomes a church, every child becomes the Christ-child, and all food and drink become a sacrament. God’s many faces are now everywhere, in flesh, tempered, and turned down, so that our human eyes can see him.”

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Sisters and brothers,

Yes, the incarnation started with Jesus has never stopped. God still takes on flesh so that every one of us can see and meet him personally. For this, he always looks for another Mary who says ‘yes’ to the divine invitation and willingly endures sufferings and difficulties to do God’s work.

Today is Christmas Eve when we look for the birth of Jesus Christ; today is Christmas Eve in which God expects his people to see and find God’s wonderful love and grace through the divine incarnation achieved through Mary two thousand years ago, and other Marys here and now. Amen.