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## *What Does It Mean to Say 'Yes' to God?*

**An Evensong meditation by the Rev. Canon George Maxwell  
The Eve of the Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary**

Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord. Let it be with me according to your word." This verse has often been described as Mary's great "yes" to God. The Patristic writers saw in her assent nothing less than the hinge of salvation history. Where Eve had turned away, Mary turned toward God. Her consent opened space for Christ to enter the world.

St. Irenaeus famously wrote that the knot of Eve's disobedience was untied by Mary's obedience. In the Anglican tradition this insight took deep root. In the Middle Ages, England was known as "Mary's dowry." Even after the Reformation, when so many images of Mary were destroyed, her Magnificat continued to be sung daily, woven into the fabric of our worship. Mary's "yes" is not only a moment in history—it continues to shape our identity as Christians.

But what does that mean for us, here and now? Beyond the weight of tradition, what would it mean for us to say "yes" to God in the way Mary did? Too often we hear answers framed as mere surrender, passive acceptance, or lonely self-denial. Even when we speak of obedience, we often reduce it to willpower or discipline. But I want to suggest something deeper—that Mary's "yes" was not primarily about will, but about being. It was a posture of her whole self that made space for God.

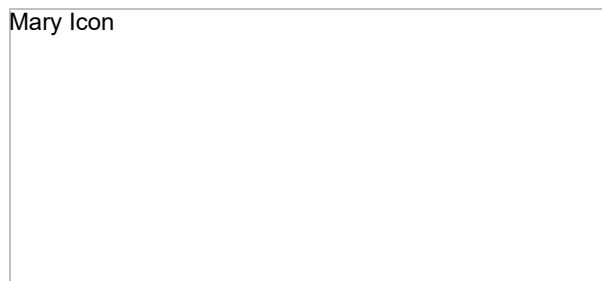
I think about this in light of a simple family story. Years ago, our summers were spent at the neighborhood pool. My stepson, Robert, was seven or eight, and the pool was packed almost every night—like a rock concert in miniature. I would strain to keep track of him: Where is he? Which one is he? Wasn't he in a red bathing suit? But there are ten red bathing suits!

Meanwhile, his mother, Mary Hunter, always seemed to know exactly where he was and what he was doing—whether he was safe, hungry, or about to try something he shouldn't. In the middle of a conversation with friends, she could glance up and quietly say, "He's over there with the ball." Or she'd give me that look that meant, "Go stop him."

What struck me was the quality of her awareness. She gave Robert real freedom to be himself, while still holding him in her loving attention. She lived her own life in that crowded place, but always in service of his well-being. I could never master this. I'm glad I married her!

That kind of attention, that quality of presence, is what I think Mary's "yes" to God looks like. It's not anxious control or passive resignation, but a steady attentiveness to God that yields an intention to be the one responsible for love.

Mary Icon





Let me bring this into focus with the icon you received today, The Virgin of the Sign. (And if you didn't get one, you can blame Chase Loomer for bringing so many people to his recital that we ran out!) This icon gives us three insights into what it means to say "yes" to God.

First: look at Mary's posture. Her head is covered in humility, and her arms are open in prayer—the ancient orans position, the same posture priests assume at the altar as the Eucharistic Prayer begins. It is a posture of openness and worship, of placing ourselves before God. To say "yes" to God, as Mary did, is to learn to pray—to open yourself to the awe and wonder of God's presence—and to live a prayerful life. Our Evensong tradition captures this perfectly: music and liturgy that free us from our egocentric tendencies so that we might experience the fullness of life God has given to us.

Second: notice that Mary is not holding Jesus, as in many other icons, but bearing him within her. Christ is hidden yet present, already shaping her life from the inside out. This is what it means for us, too. Faith is not only praying to Christ, but allowing Christ to pray in us. Paul writes in Romans that the Spirit intercedes within us with sighs too deep for words. To say "yes" to God is to trust that Christ lives and prays within us, aligning us with the Father—even, or especially, in our weakness. Often it is when we are least capable, most helpless, that we discover God's presence most vividly.

Third: look at Mary's eyes. You might expect them to rest on Jesus, but instead they gaze outward—toward the world, toward us. Having prayed in humility, having carried Christ within, she now looks outward with new vision. This is the church's calling: to worship, to be transformed in Christ, and then to bear witness to God's presence in the world as it truly is—not as we wish it to be, but as it is.

These three things—prayer, Christ within us, and vision for the world—are what it means for the church to say yes to God.

So let me leave you with one practice for this week. Too often we think of faith as simply asking, "What would Jesus do?" But before doing comes being. Try spending this week with that order in mind: let your doing flow from your being. First, be aware of Christ praying within you. Rest in that presence. And then, out of gratitude, let your actions flow. If you get that sequence right—being before doing—it can transform your life.

And if you forget, just glance at the icon you took home. Let it remind you that Mary's yes is not simply her story, but an invitation for us to say yes to God as well.

Amen.

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