

# Religion

## Motherhood a good metaphor for discipleship

By JIM RYAN  
Fourth Sunday in Advent  
Luke 1:26-38  
Dec. 23, 1990



Religion  
and  
Reality  
By JIM RYAN

**SOME TROUBLE CONCEIVING**  
In the many post-apocalyptic novels written today, women have trouble conceiving. This is not a new problem for literature. The Bible has numerous stories about women who have difficulty conceiving. The mothers of Isaac, Samuel, John the Baptist,

and Mary, are all old and barren. For these women the possibility of conceiving and giving birth is, at least in the case of Sarah, laughable. When it happens, it is certainly unexpected and a sign of God's intervention.

When we consider the conception of Jesus, we find that the unexpected has become the impossible: Mary does not have a sexual partner.

In all of these stories, childbirth and discipleship are linked. Each story presents a passage in salvation history, and the people in the stories share in the making of that history.

In the case of Mary, we see that the Gospels have presented her absent to do the will of God as the very model of discipleship. As Abraham is the father of the faith because of his willingness to enter the mysterious paths of God, Mary is the mother of the church.

### MOTHERHOOD AS METAPHOR

Motherhood is a good metaphor for discipleship because with her assent to do the will of God, responsibilities follow inexorably. A mother's role is not finished at childbirth. She must feed, clothe and nurture the child. When we read the Gospels we see that Mary follows the mysterious life of her son, constantly meditating, as Luke writes, on the meaning of his life. She follows him, when the others have fled, to the very foot of the cross and beyond, to the origins of the church at Pentecost.

### A POST-APOCALYPTIC NATIVITY SCENE

Mary is still a model of discipleship for us. In a recent novel by Roberta Morris, Vigil, we watch a tattered community which has survived the nuclear blast and is trying to cope with the contamination of its food and water supply. Up to this point no woman has been able to conceive and successfully carry a child to term because of the genetic damage caused by the radiation.

The community wonders if it is the remnant of human-kind bearing within itself the seed of new life, or only the pathetic leftovers of the nuclear age. The community waits hopefully as one woman draws closer to her delivery date. Finally, she gives birth. Their hope is replaced with horror however, and one onlooker utters the words of the centurion at the foot of the cross. "Surely this is the son of God."

Consider this carefully. This new Mary's consent to bear a child carries with it the responsibility to attend the child's crucifixion, a crucifixion that takes place in her own womb. This woman doesn't have time to nurture and love her child, or to contemplate the meaning of its life.

Discipleship in such an age, where birth means crucifixion, indicates that our assent to do God's will will bring sudden and unsettling results.

### LITERATURE AND LIFE

We've been thinking about literature and the Bible. What does this have to do with our daily lives?

The function of literature according to Viktor Shklovsky in his book, Theory of Prose, is to make us see. Literature's chief technique in achieving this end is what Shklovsky calls estrangement. Literature makes the familiar strange so that it can be freshly perceived. To do this it presents its material in unexpected, even outlandish ways: the shock of the new.

Conception isn't new for humankind, neither is reading the account of the Annunciation during Advent new for Christians, but conception and the announcing of conception, whether biological or metaphorical, is new for humankind, every time it happens.

Endnote: Material on Viktor Shklovsky is taken from a book review by Michael Dirda in the Manchester Guardian Weekly, Dec. 16, 1990.

## United Church opposed to Mid-East conflict

The United Church of Canada's Toronto Conference is mobilizing support for a negotiated settlement of the Gulf crisis. Church members will send postcards to Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and External Affairs Minister Joe Clark calling on them to "declare Canada's absolute commitment to a negotiated resolution of the Gulf crisis." The postcards also appeal for Canada to remain committed to the use of sanctions, rather than military action.

In a letter to the Conference's 350 congregations, President Rev. Dr. David McKane says it is "imperative that we give sanctions time to work. It is critical that we not be drawn into armed aggression out of frustration or political expediency."

"It would be tragic if people were to die either because of our indifference or our inability to think of other ways of conducting the affairs of the world," writes McKane. "Such an atrocity must be resisted in every way possible."

## Bible digest

"Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Isaiah 55:2

Driving in the fast lane of materialism and selfishness will not bring you joy. Spend your time, money and energy on that which has eternal dividends.

"Two things have I required of

thee: deny me them not before I die: Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me; Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain." Proverbs 30: 7-9

Agur realized that the extremes of both poverty and wealth could turn our focus away from the Lord. Be sure to crown the Lord a King in every area of your life no matter what it may be.

# IT'S CHRISTMAS!

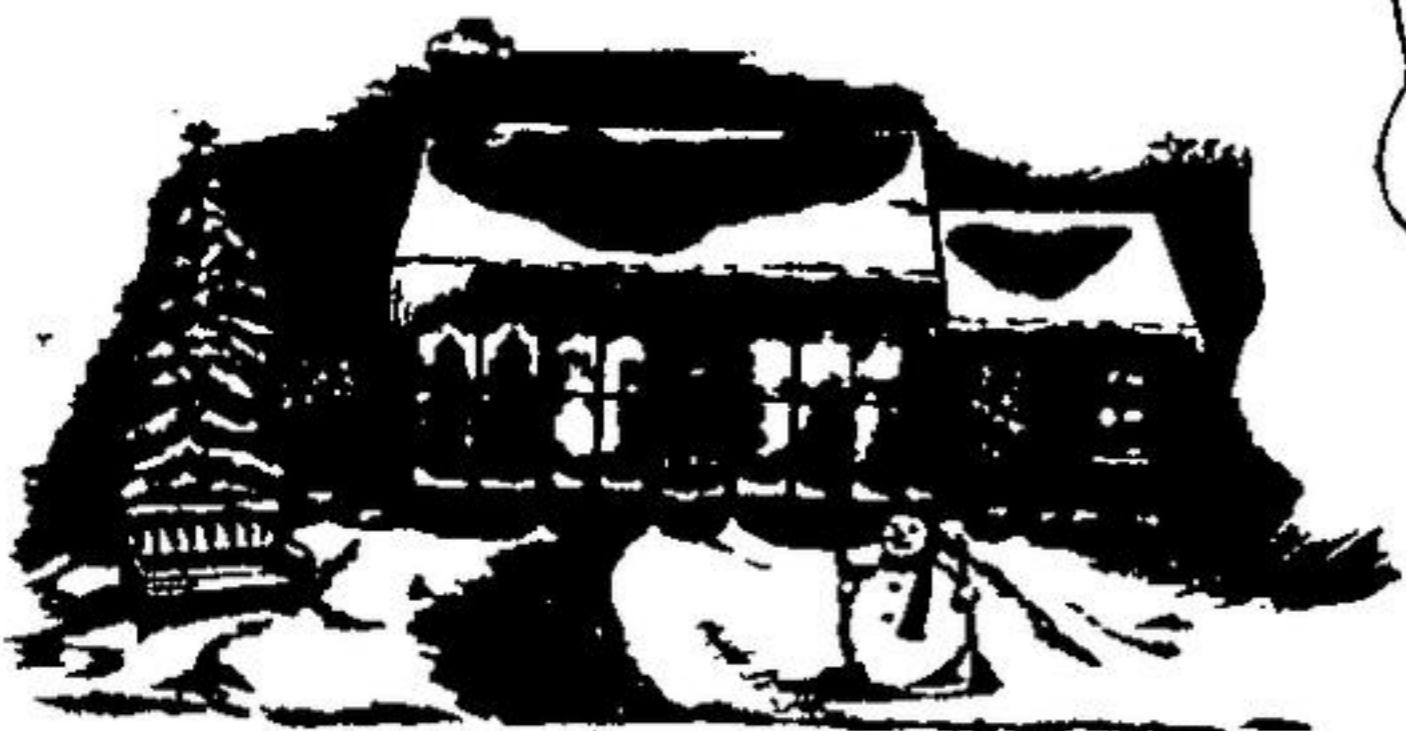


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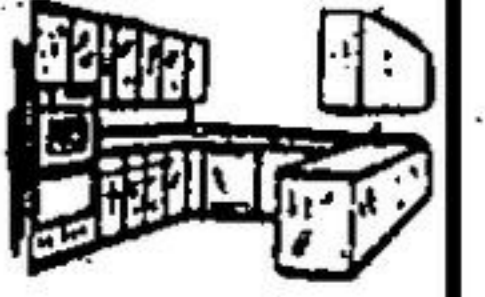
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#### CHRISTMAS SERVICES

Dec. 23rd - ADVENT IV  
8:00 a.m. Eucharist  
10:30 a.m. Eucharist  
Dec. 24th - 7 p.m. Family Eucharist  
11 p.m. Choral Eucharist and Carols  
Dec. 25th - 10:30 a.m. Eucharist  
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#### SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

Thursday, Dec. 20: after the 7:30 p.m. Mass  
Friday, Dec. 21: after the 7:30 p.m. Mass  
Saturday, Dec. 22: 9:30 a.m. until 4:45 p.m. and immediately after the 5:00 p.m. Mass  
Monday, Dec. 24: 10:00 a.m. until 12 Noon; 3:00 p.m. until 5:00 p.m.

#### MASS SCHEDULE

Christmas Eve: 7:00 p.m., 9:00 p.m., 12 Midnight  
Christmas Day: 10:00 a.m., 12 Noon (note NO 8 a.m. Mass)  
December 29/30: Saturday at 5:00 p.m.; Sunday at 8:00 a.m., 10:00 a.m. and 12 Noon  
New Year's Eve and Day: regular Sunday Schedule