

## Introduction: A True Hero!

- *In September 1998, a policeman was trying to settle a dispute between neighbours in Southampton. Suddenly, out of the corner of his eye, he caught sight of a toddler hanging onto a swinging window, 30 feet up a block of flats nearby. He started sprinting towards the wee one. The 21 month old, whose name was Kieran Holland, lost their grip and first slipped onto a ledge, before sliding off towards the concrete paving stones below. Just in time the PC arrived, and half caught Kieran, breaking his fall. Kieran still sustained a fractured skull, but subsequently made a full recovery. The policeman, whose name was Darius Hemmatpour (!), told reporters, "I'm just glad I was there. I've never been affected by anything so much in the six years I've been a policeman." Kieran's gran said of PC Hemmatpour, "He's a hero and saved my grandson's life!"*
- I wonder what it is that makes a true hero, someone we can look up to and admire?
  - society often says money, power, ability (soccer, pop);
- When God was looking for someone to bear and bring up his son, what did he look for?
  - to her contemporaries, Mary may have seemed insignificant, but God saw in her qualities he could use!

## Humility

- First quality God found in Mary was **humility**.
- Another story, this time made up:
  - cleaner in bank; never taken much notice off; taken for granted; not well paid; foiled a bank raid! Suddenly lots of attention, media, reporters, TV cameras... unsettling, not quite sure how to take the attention - but when the time had come for her to act, she hadn't shirked it.
- Mary was like that!
  - she was from a lowly background, didn't even have the priestly background that her relative Elizabeth did;
  - young, unmarried, no vote, no power, no influence;
  - disturbed, troubled by, uncomfortable with the attention when the angel came to her;
  - (see how she did NOT say: "*at last, my big chance, my dreams come true!*")
- But though she didn't seek the limelight, neither did she shrink back from God's call:
  - **real humility accepts God's leading anywhere, and doesn't wish to be anywhere else**

## Obedience

- Second quality God found in Mary was **obedience**.
- I'm fond of Asterix!!
  - funny; Gauls fighting Romans; but often accurate depictions of Roman world; troops in action, tortoises etc - effectiveness of Roman troops was substantially down to way they fought together, with a clear command structure.
- Obedience made Roman troops astonishingly successful in conquering their enemies.
- Mary's life was centred on obeying God:
  - "*I am the Lord's servant,*" *Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said."* (Luke 1:38)
- That took courage and strength in the face of almost certain shame (**unmarried mother!**)
- However, for those that know themselves and God in the way that Mary did, it is far riskier to ignore God than to obey Him and depend on His mercy.
  - for we know that He will work things out for us and for his glory, even if we suffer in the process.

## Wisdom

- *Two men applied for a job in a computer software company. The two applicants, having the same qualifications, were asked to take a test by the personnel manager. Upon completion of the test both men had failed to answer just one of the questions. The manager went to the second of the two and said, "Thank you for your interest, but we've decided to give the job to the other applicant." The rejected applicant was angry! "Why are you rejecting me? We both got nine answers correct. What made you decide to take him and not me when we both had the same qualifications and the same scores on the test?" The personnel manager replied, "We have made our decision not on the correct answers, but on the question neither of you could answer." The rejected applicant asked, "And just how could one wrong answer be better than the other?" "Simple", the personnel manager replied, "The other applicant wrote 'I don't know' for question five. You wrote down, 'Neither do I!'"*
- It didn't take much **wisdom**, much insight, for the personnel manager to see to the heart of things, to pick out the one fact that was really important, that gave the game away for the rejected applicant.
- **Mary was a woman of great wisdom and understanding.**
- Look at the way she weaves the great themes of the faith into her song (vs.46-55) shows her understanding of the Old Testament and her ability to interpret, communicate and worship.
- God used Mary, and Mary understood God's plans, saw the big picture of what God was up to:
  - bringing salvation, blessing all people, keeping his promises!!
- She understood, and became a partner in those plans, because she nurtured wisdom:
  - not just knowledge, but understanding of what God is doing;
  - Scripture, prayer, thoughtfulness about God's working.
- *As the writer of Proverbs wrote in 4:7: "Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding."*

## Conclusion

- As we come towards this Christmas, with all its glitter and glitz, with all the focus on money (and what it can buy), on personalities in the media as we spend even more time than normal watching TV...
  - let's not be dazzled by the stereotypes of greatness, by the heroes the world offers us.
- Instead, let us nurture in ourselves those qualities of true greatness: humility, obedience and wisdom.
- And let us nurture a respect for those same qualities in others.
  - those qualities that Mary, the Lord's mother, demonstrated, as she prepared for the arrival of her first child.