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Mary: Girl of Destiny

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Text: Luke 1:26–38 (Feast of the Annunciation)

One of the only two reasons I read the Kitchener-Waterloo *Record* is to follow the comic strip "Calvin and Hobbes". Did you catch it last week? Calvin decided that he was no longer just Calvin, but he was now "Calvin, Boy of Destiny". In one strip he was trying to teach his mother just how to say it: pause a bit after "Boy" and drop the pitch and extend "Destiny": Boy—of D-e-s-t-i-n-y.

I suppose one of the reasons I like "Calvin and Hobbes" is that Calvin so much embodies all of us. I mean, when I was six or seven I really wanted to be famous. I could get into "Robert—Boy of Destiny". Any one else?

Unfortunately we all too soon figure out the truth of what Andy Warhol said: in the age of television we will all be famous for ten minutes. Too bad for me I peaked early. When I was in Grade Eight by a quirk of fate I ended up on the Truth or Consequences show with Bob Barker. For my ten minutes of fame I got \$20 and a set of stainless steel serving dishes. My mother may still have one of the serving dishes, but I haven't seen it for four or five years. In the age of *People* magazine and the *National Enquirer*, that may be all it means to be "Robert—Boy of Destiny".

So in today's gospel lesson we have before us Mary, the most famous and beloved woman who ever lived. Can you imagine six-year-old Mary in Nazareth teaching her mother to say "Mary—Girl of Destiny"? Or trying to figure out how to get on TV next to Bob Barker? "And our next contestant,

The Virgin Mary! Come on down!” Nah, it just doesn’t work. Not very likely. I don’t think she ever heard of Andy Warhol.

And yet Mary seems to be one of those people who is authentically herself. In the midst of what must have been a most traumatic moment, she keeps her equilibrium. She understands fairly quickly what is going on and what her role in all this will be. Here is a woman who has never given destiny or fame a second thought, but who clearly knows who she is.

As she sits around not doing much of anything one day, in through her window comes this really weird looking whatever who completely changes her life. This whoever tells her that she is indeed a girl of destiny, that she has been chosen by God for the most important mission ever. She has been chosen to be the first to carry within her the real presence of the incarnate Christ. She will be the mother of God. A long way from Truth or Consequences!

We live in a culture of authenticity, a culture in which it is very important that we each make something unique of ourselves, that we each discover our own originality, our own particular destiny. We think that our destiny is something that we have to discover deep inside ourselves as we struggle against all tradition and everything outside of ourselves. We think that our unique destiny is something we create, that we choose our destiny by selecting from the various options that our culture offers to us. But what our culture has been offering us lately doesn’t seem much worth striving after. Somehow, life has to mean more than a big house in the suburbs with a BMW out front and ever-dissolving relationships. The struggle to build our own authenticity and discover our own destiny seems to have short-circuited. In his 1991 Massey Lectures Charles Taylor calls this the malaise of modernity.

Maybe we can learn something about destiny if we look a little closer at what happened to Mary, because she doesn’t seem to have suffered from the same sort of malaise that grips us. Did Mary’s destiny well up from deep inside her? No, it came to her from outside of herself, from the call of God to her communicated by a strange and foreign messenger. Mary’s destiny was not a product of her own choice, nor did it have anything to do with what happened to be on offer from the intellectual or economic establishment of Nazareth. Her destiny

came as a call into a mission which involved her whole being, but which was much larger than herself.

Mary did not have to struggle to earn her destiny, it was given her as a gift from God along with her call into mission. If Mary was an authentic person, a person different from anyone else the world has ever known, this wasn't because she started out different, nor because she worked harder at authenticity than anyone else. It was all a gift of God, an unconditional promise from God that was fulfilled in the mission to which God called her. Mary's destiny lies in the gift of being called to be a servant of God, of the promise of submitting to the mission that God has chosen for her. God gave to Mary unconditionally, and so Mary was able to give to God unconditionally.

If we want to be authentic human beings, if we want to be girls and boys of destiny, we can't fool ourselves that our authentic destiny is discovered by choosing that which seems best to us from among the products on offer on our television. We cannot create our own frameworks of meaning by raw choice, or by hard work. We cannot discover ultimate reality deep in our own psyche. Destiny is always a call from a God who is other than us, and authenticity is bearing the real presence of Christ in the world. The good news is that the God who is revealed in Mary's baby is not one who leaves us on our own to struggle along as best we can. The God of Mary is one who lovingly calls us out of meaninglessness into the destiny of servanthood. Let it be to us according to God's will. Amen.