

At Christmas we welcome Jesus who is like us in every way, apart from sin. The Old Testament reading from Isaiah is one of the servant songs which tell us that the servant of the Lord would be called from the time when he is in his mother's womb for his service. His mouth would be like a sharpened sword which penetrates between bone and marrow and exposes everything. God had kept him in the shadow of his hand and made him into a polished arrow concealed in his quiver. It is these prophecies about the servant of God that Jesus fulfills. Luke tells us that the angel Gabriel went to Mary and said that she was highly favored and that the Lord was with her. He went on to say to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son and you will have to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give the throne of his father David and he will reign over Jacob's descendants, his kingdom will never end." Mary wondered how these things were going to take place since she was a virgin. The angel reassured her saying, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the Holy one to be born will be called the Son of God." Mary replied, "I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled." So we see that right from the conception of Jesus in the womb of Mary it was the act of God according to the plan of God.

Mary is overjoyed at this news and goes to meet Elizabeth and when Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in the womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Elizabeth immediately prophesized saying, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you bear! But why am I so favored that the mother of my Lord has come to me? Mary too said, "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me-Holy is his name." So we see that Jesus took this human form right from his conception, was carried by Mary as all mothers do, for a period of nine months till she gave birth to Jesus. Jesus is fully human and fully divine which is a concept difficult to understand. When God in Christ took human form he lived and breathed like any ordinary human being.

We remember that as soon as Jesus was baptized he too was tempted by Satan in the wilderness for 40 days. If Satan knew that Jesus was not a human being then he would not have wasted his time trying to tempt Jesus. There was a real possibility for Christ to succumb to the temptation though he did not. Jesus knew the maximum power of temptation as Satan and his host tried everything within their means to make him sin.

In the letter to the Hebrews the writer reminds us that Jesus was made perfect through his sufferings. This doesn't mean that Jesus was imperfect but rather that suffering was a pre-requisite for the work of salvation. The writer tells us that the one who makes people Holy and those who are made Holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters.

The writer further states that children have flesh and blood, and he too shared in the humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death-that is, the devil-and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. So Jesus came to us in flesh and blood as a real human being but through his death and resurrection he defeated the devil who held people in captivity and slavery by their fear of death. The writer says, "For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people" (Heb. 2:17 NIV). Because he himself suffered when he was tempted he is able to help those who are tempted.

All of us are tempted and sometimes we may feel that we are the only ones who are going through such temptations. Jesus overcame those temptations and stood firm without sinning. Knowing that Christ has overcome the maximum power of temptation helps us to take courage that when we are tempted he understands what we are going through. The writer of Hebrews says, "For you do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses but we have one who is tempted in every way-just as we are-yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." As we come to celebrate this Christmas season may we be constantly reminded that Christ is always standing with us as a person who has overcome temptation and helps us in our time of need.