



**The Whole World  
Awaits Mary's  
Response**

*An Advent Homily by  
St. Bernard of  
Clairvaux*

*This excerpt from a homily In Praise of the Virgin Mother by St. Bernard (Hom. 4, 8-9: Opera omnia, Edit. Cisterc. 4 [1966], 53-54) is used in the Roman Office of Readings on December 20, in the fourth week of Advent. Bernard dramatically celebrates Mary's Fiat, or statement of consent in response to the announcement by the archangel Gabriel, behold the handmaiden of the Lord; "let it be done to me according to your word."*

**You have heard, O Virgin,** that you will conceive and bear a son; you have heard that it will not be by man but by the Holy Spirit. The angel awaits an answer; it is time for him to return to God who sent him. We too are waiting, O Lady, for your word of compassion; the sentence of condemnation weighs heavily upon us.

**The price of our salvation** is offered to you. We shall be set free at once if you consent. In the eternal Word of God we all came to be, and behold, we die. In your brief response we are to be remade in order to be recalled to life.

**Tearful Adam** with his sorrowing family begs this of you, O loving Virgin, in their exile from Paradise. Abraham begs it, David begs it. All the other holy patriarchs, your ancestors, ask it of you, as they dwell in the country of the shadow of death. This is what the whole earth waits for, prostrate at your feet. It is right in doing so, for on your word depends comfort for the wretched, ransom for the captive, freedom for the condemned, indeed, salvation for all the sons of Adam, the whole of your race.

**Answer quickly, O Virgin.** Reply in haste to the angel, or rather through the angel to the Lord. Answer with a word, receive the Word of God. Speak your own word, conceive the divine Word. Breathe a passing word, embrace the eternal Word.

**Why do you delay,** why are you afraid? Believe, give praise, and receive. Let humility be bold, let modesty be confident. This is no time for virginal simplicity to forget prudence. In this matter alone, O prudent Virgin, do not fear to be presumptuous. Though modest silence is pleasing, dutiful speech is now more

necessary.

**Open your heart** to faith, O blessed Virgin, your lips to praise, your womb to the Creator. See, the desired of all nations is at your door, knocking to enter. If he should pass by because of your delay, in sorrow you would begin to seek him afresh, the One whom your soul loves.

**Arise, hasten, open.** Arise in faith, hasten in devotion, open in praise and thanksgiving. **Behold the handmaid of the Lord,** she says, **be it done to me according to your word.**