

My brothers and sisters,

We come together as a council today on the Memorial of the Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary. I think this is a fitting day for us, as the Blessed Virgin is the very model of who we are called to be as a Church! Today's readings give us some clues about Holy Mary, about where we come from, and about the situation we find ourselves in at the moment.

We begin with the prophet Micah who reminds us that great things will emerge from the smallest and oddest of places! He confidently announces that it is from Bethlehem that God will begin his work of salvation for the world. Bethlehem? A nowhere shepherds' town? Surely God would want to make a bigger splash on the world scene than by starting in Bethlehem of all places! Yet, it is precisely here in this small and out of the way place that God's invasion of sanctifying grace will begin! God always uses the small and the forgotten to confound the proud and the mighty!

Next, after a long genealogy filled with heroes and failures, we have the announcement that Mary, pregnant by the Holy Spirit, along with Joseph, her spouse, will bring forth the Savior of the world, the Christ. This announcement comes in a place even more out of the way than Bethlehem! It happens in Nazareth — at the time a tiny, dusty, village in the hill country north of Jerusalem. The invasion of God's grace, once again, starts in a very unlikely place, among very unlikely people!

And there is a message from God for us in all this. So often we are looking for God in the big, the glamorous, the fantastic, and the sensational. But truly, God is at work the most in the places we don't normally look! God is always doing something new among the poor, those at the margins, and within people who are wounded and needy.

Perhaps this is why Pope Francis keeps referring to the Church as field hospital. Field hospitals are not nice, well organized, clean, lovely places. No, they are places that are chaotic, full of the wounded, often dirty, and always in danger! That's where God is working! And its in such circumstances that we find Holy Mary, the Mother of God, the most pure virgin, present and shining in her faithfulness to God! Its at the foot of Christ's blood soaked cross that we find her standing. Its dealing with life's inconveniences in little hang-dog towns like Bethlehem and Nazareth that we find her. Faithful. Pure. Being a Mother to her children.

We know the Church is a field hospital right now. The battle rages around us. It feels chaotic. The wounded are being brought in more quickly than it seems we can handle. Yet Mary is here, with us, in quiet wisdom, praying for us, consoling us, and calling us to remain with her at the foot of her Son's cross.

And we are a Pastoral Council in the midst of the field hospital right now. Let us take our example from Holy Mary. Let us trust her with our care. Let us turn to her for the direction of our Church. Let us look for the signs of God's work, his invasion of grace, in the unusual places!