

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 8

DO YOU SEE THE FRUITS IN THE ORCHARD?

As you consider the fruit, bring yourself back to the experience of being lost in the orchard: trees span as far as you can see in either direction. You hear leaves crunch underfoot as the breeze blows your hair away from your face. You pause to take stock of the fruit the tree has to offer. While there are a variety of options from which to choose, you pick the firmest, most brightly colored fruit you can find.

Previously, we reflected on the orchard as a metaphor for the depth and breadth of God's love for us. Today, on the feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, our focus shifts to the fruit the tree bears, while considering also God's gift of free will. Perhaps the most well-known example of the exercising of free will is found in the story of Adam and Eve, today's Hebrew scripture reading. Notably, while both individuals attempt to pass blame elsewhere, it is worth remembering that they both also had the opportunity to decline the fruit. As we all have experienced in our own lives, choices have consequences. The choices of Adam and Eve to consume the fruit offered by the serpent cost them life in the Garden of Eden. We know that had they made a different choice, they would have enjoyed a life in paradise free from pain. Indeed, they are the first of us to learn of the consequences of free will.



Meanwhile, the gospel reading documents a wildly different exercise of free will in the form of Mary's "Yes" to the angel Gabriel. While, understandably, Mary has a few questions at first, ultimately, her response is one of acceptance: "May it be done to me according to your word." Her response signifies a radical choice to welcome God's plan — despite the risk it will require. Despite the risk of pregnancy out of apparent wedlock, and the risk of losing her betrothed, Joseph, her courageous choice allows for the Savior, Jesus, to be brought into the world.

How are we using the gift of free will to say 'Yes' to where God might be inviting us this Advent, despite the challenges our 'Yes' might bring?

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