

It was November last year when I had the pleasure to sit down with Sam and Bri for the first time to congratulate them in person and begin plans for their wedding. On a wedding day, most people know that the bride and groom are going to face unpredictable challenges in the future. But on their engagement day, everybody expects that the couple will have a busy but predictable preparation for the wedding. In hindsight, none of us had a clue about the challenges Bri and Samuel would face in the months ahead. They've had to recalculate this day again and again. But to their credit, here they are; and to your credit, here you are. As Bri told me last month, "We know what's important: We're getting married, and we're getting married in the church." The cathedral is proud to have you both here today, sharing with us, in spite of every obstacle, your hope for the future.

Throughout the Catholic world today we celebrate the Assumption of Mary. We believe that at the end of Mary's life, God brought her body and soul into heaven. The angel Gabriel greeted her as Mary, full of grace, a title we use every time we pray the Hail Mary, and one that explains her Assumption. If she was truly full of grace, then surely God welcomed her immediately to paradise.

It's a beautiful occasion for a wedding, and especially for this particular wedding. The gospel tells about Mary's visit to her kinswoman, when Elizabeth greeted her with some other words we use in the Hail Mary, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb." Then Mary praises God with a hymn that we call the Magnificat. She sings in awe that all these events are happening to her. As a young lady, Mary probably thought she knew what the future would bring, but she had no idea about the blessings God had in store for her or the challenges she would face in receiving them. Nonetheless, in her Magnificat, she prays, "the Almighty has done great things for me and holy is his Name. He has mercy on those who fear him in every generation." God takes those who are downtrodden and lifts them on high.

We gather here in faith at a time when we face great uncertainty, and Samuel and Briana come to us with a message of certainty: They know that love exists, that God has created them and made them for each other, and that nothing will separate them from their love of God or their love for each other. Just as God bestowed mercy on Mary on the most important day of her life, so God has mercy in store for Samuel and Bri on this day and every day. Mary accepted her role at a time of great uncertainty, inspiring this couple and all of us to do the same. Thanks to football, the Hail Mary has become the prayer you say to win no matter what.

Bri and Samuel, you both know a lot about good physical health. You have also grown this year in emotional health and spiritual health. We all commend you. We stand beside you. And we thank you for letting us see a piece of God's mysterious plan, a plan that was hidden even to a young virgin named Mary, fully revealed at her Assumption, and a plan that promises you life, joy and happiness for ever.