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"It's not been a great year," Nancy Reagan said this week. "It's been the lowest I think you can get." Within the space of nine days our first lady lost a breast to cancer and then suffered the death of her mother. Even the lifestyles of the rich and famous include grief.

The holidays bring traditions and traditions bring memories. Often the memories are good, of past happy moments, but sometimes they're bad. The heavier the grief during the year, the more real it becomes at Christmas. Maybe you know people who have not had a great year, but the lowest you can get. Or maybe you've had one like that yourself. ✦ If so, we can assist one another by keeping alive the meaning of Christmas--the birthday of our Savior.

To remind us of what Christmas means, today's liturgy holds up to our gaze one of the most paradoxical figures of Advent, Mary. We know Mary by many titles, but there are two by which we know her best. She is virgin and she is mother. By those two titles Mary is a paradox. It's physically impossible to be both virgin and mother, and yet Mary was both, that is our belief.

Why did God choose to be born into the world from a virgin? The tradition of the Church is that Mary was a virgin not only before Jesus was conceived but after his birth as well. The entire pregnancy did not violate her virginity.

This is a clue to the meaning of having a virgin-mother; namely, that in nature, it cannot be done. Birth from a virgin is not natural, it is supernatural. Birth from a virgin demonstrates that God has complete power over the universe, and more, that God brokered this power in an extraordinary way to save the world. Gabriel's annunciation to Mary announces that God is almighty, and that God is all-loving. That's the good news about Christmas. *the virgin birth*

So, To those who are downhearted this holiday season we, as a parish, we want to speak a word of hope. We know there is sickness in your ~~family~~ ^{home}, but we await the coming of one who heals. We know there is sadness in your heart, but we await one who loves you. We know there is death in your family, but we await one who gives life. We know you feel helpless, but we await one with enough power to change your life; and to prove it, he will be born from a virgin. This week above all others, we as a parish go forth to bring hope to a world that waits.