

In celebrating the birth of Our Lady, we are celebrating something of the mystery of our own. Mystery in the sense here of wonder that we exist at all, that we have come into being not through any will of our own. Here we are and could just as well have not been. As we live and later reflect on this mystery, this birth of self-will from no personal choice at all, we seek to trace its origin in the will of our parents and their parents, and so on. And of course it takes us back to that very first act of will, not only of Abraham but of Adam and Eve and still beyond that to the mystery of it all, this appearance of will from no-will, this appearance which culminates ultimately in Mary's 'Yes' to an angel, not as an act of self-will but free will, of taking responsibility for an act which plunges her and us into even deeper mystery. And as we look back at Israel's history, we see this stepping into mystery over and over again, this birth of new possibilities from a chequered past, a past full of surprises, highlighted in today's genealogy by those four women who in any tidy account of our origins wouldn't be there: Tamar who *coerces her father-in-law Judah to provide an heir for her*; Rahab a *prostitute in Jericho providing us with Boaz a great, great, grandfather of David*; Ruth a Moabite woman who conceives Obed by Boaz and *carries on the divine line*. And finally, the wife of Uriah who bears David a son, Solomon, *after David arranged to have Uriah killed in battle*. We step into the mystery of the mix here between God taking responsibility for our lives and our own taking responsibility for them. Who is in charge here? one might ask. But, as we saw yesterday, in Catherine Coldstream's account of her life in Carmel, it's more of a dialogue than a matter of blind obedience to another's will. God doesn't so much provide us with answers, or even directives, as with questions that demand a response – that taking-up of responsibility by ourselves. We may ask of God 'What do You want?', 'What is Your will for me?' only to hear 'No, what do you want?', 'What part do you want to play in this unfolding genealogy full of surprises?' This genealogy which has provided us with a Christ-figure to surprise us all, a question yet to be answered, or at least answered fully, in our own lives. Or as we heard in the letter to the Romans, *God co-operates with all those who love him*. In this sense we are indeed co-creators of this mystery in which we live.

PS with some borrowings from The Collegeville Biblical Commentary and, at one point, the delicious misprinting of Rahab as Rehab – now there's food for thought.

Br John Mayhead
 Monastery of Christ Our Saviour