

## THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN

### A. The fact of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary:

In St. Luke 1:26-38, the Evangelist tells us that in the sixth month after the conception of St. John the Baptist by Elizabeth, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to the Virgin Mary, at Nazareth, a small town in the mountains of Galilee.

Mary was of the house of David, and was espoused (i.e. married) to Joseph, of the same royal family.

The opinion that St. Joseph, at the time of the Annunciation, was an aged widower and Mary twelve or fifteen years of age is founded only upon apocryphal documents.

Mary had, however, not yet entered the household of her spouse. And the angel, having taken the figure and the form of man, came into the house and said to her: *“Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.”*

Mary having heard the greeting words did not speak; she was troubled in spirit.

And the angel continued and said: *“Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God. Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of David his father; and he shall reign in the house of Jacob forever. And of his kingdom there shall be no end.”*

The Virgin understood that there was question of the coming Redeemer. But, why should she be elected from amongst women for the splendid dignity of being the mother of the Messiah, having vowed her virginity to God? (St. Augustine). Therefore, not doubting the word of God like Zachary, but filled with fear and astonishment, she said: *“How shall this be done, because I know not man?”*

The angel to remove Mary's anxiety and to assure her that her virginity would be spared answered: *“The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee. And therefore also the Holy One which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.”*

In token of the truth of his word he made known to her the conception of St. John, the miraculous pregnancy of her relative now old and sterile: *“And behold, thy cousin Elizabeth; she also has conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month with her that is called barren: because no word shall be impossible with God.”*

Mary clinging to the first words of the angel and trusting to the Omnipotence of God she said: *“Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to thy word.”*

This event is commemorated by the feast of the Annunciation, which is kept on the twenty-fifth of March, by the Angelus, and in the first words of the Hail Mary.

### B. The Annunciation opens historically and theologically the Mystery of Incarnation:

The Annunciation is the beginning of Jesus in His human nature. Through His mother He is a member of the human race. If the virginity of Mary before, during, and after the conception of her Divine Son was always considered part of the deposit of faith, this was done only on account of the historical facts and testimonials.

About to found a new generation of the children of God, The Redeemer does not arrive in the way of earthly generations: the power of the Holy Ghost enters the chaste womb of the Virgin, forming the humanity of Christ.

Many holy fathers (Sts. Jerome, Cyril, Ephrem, Augustine) say that the consent of Mary was essential to the Redemption. It was the will of God, St. Thomas says (Summa III:30), that the Redemption of mankind should depend upon the consent of the Virgin Mary.

This does not mean that God in His plans was bound by the will of a creature, and that man would not have been redeemed, if Mary had not consented. It only means that the consent of Mary was foreseen from all eternity, and therefore was received as essential into the design of God.

#### C. Necessity of the Annunciation (Summa III:30, 1):

St. Thomas Aquinas gives four reasons *“that it should be announced to the Blessed Virgin that she was to conceive Christ”*:

- 1 - Our Lady had to be informed in mind concerning the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, before conceiving Him in the flesh. As *“Mary is more blessed in receiving the faith of Christ, than in conceiving the flesh of Christ”*; and *“Her nearness as a Mother would have been of no profit to Mary, had she not borne Christ in her heart after a more blessed manner than in her flesh.”* (St. Augustine, De Sancta Virgine. iii)
- 2 - To be a more certain witness of this mystery, the Virgin had to be instructed therein by God.
- 3 - The answer of our Lady is the occasion for her to offer to God the free gift of her obedience: which she proved herself right ready to do, saying: *“Behold the handmaid of the Lord.”*
- 4 - Her answer is the consecration of a spiritual wedlock between the Son of God and human nature. The Virginal consent was besought in lieu of that of the entire human nature.

#### D. “The angel Gabriel was sent by God,” (Lk 1:26) why?:

St. Thomas Aquinas (Summa III:30, 2) gives three reasons why the Archangel Gabriel announced the Annunciation to our Lady.

- 1 - Divine things are brought to men by means of the angels, who were the firsts to be taught about the mystery of the Incarnation. Afterwards the grace of knowledge was imparted to us through the most god-like Gabriel.
- 2 - *“It was an apt beginning of man's restoration that an angel should be sent by God to the Virgin who was to be hallowed by the Divine Birth: since the first cause of man's ruin was through the serpent being sent by the devil to cajole the woman by the spirit of pride.”* (St. Bede, in Annunt.)
- 3 - *“It is well that an angel be sent to the Virgin; because virginity is ever close to the angelic nature. Surely to live in the flesh and not according to the flesh is not an earthly but a heavenly life.”* (St. Jerome in Annunt.)

#### E. The order of the Annunciation(Summa III:30, 4):

St. Gabriel was *“sent by God”*, original cause of all order to announce unto the Virgin (Lk 1:26).

- 1 - In the most perfect Divine order, the angel draws the attention of the Virgin to the consideration of a matter of such moment. *“Full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women.”* By greeting her by a new and unwonted salutation, he asserts her worthiness of the conception and then foretold the honor which would result to her therefrom.
- 2 - The Archangel reassured and instructed our Lady about the mystery of the Incarnation, which was to be fulfilled in her. Saying: *“Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb,”* he foretold the conception and birth. Saying: *“He shall be great”*, he declares the dignity of the child conceived. Finally, when he said: *“The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee”*, he made her known the mode of conception.
- 3 - By the utterance of Elizabeth, and by the argument from Divine omnipotence, St. Gabriel concludes his address to lead her mind to consent.