

## The Annunciation

The annunciation of Archangel Gabriel to St. Mary for the birth of our Savior was a clear transition in the history of humanity. Through it, the divine incarnation started, and blessings has outpoured on mankind. Therefore, the Church counts the Annunciation feast as the first major feast of the Lord, as it is indeed the first among all feasts.

This week is the second Sunday of the month Kiahk in which the Church reads to us the story of annunciation from the gospel of Saint Luke (Luke 1: 26-38). Let us meditate on some of the deep meanings of this great occasion:

+ *“To a city of Galilee named Nazareth..”* The annunciation to St. Mary took place in a poor and humble place, unlike the annunciation to Zechariah the priest, which happened in the temple before the priests and many people. This is how Christ emptied Himself even in the annunciation of His birth.

+ *“To a virgin betrothed...”* This is the Virgin who Isaiah prophesized about 740 years earlier (Is. 7:14). And she is who Ezekiel referred to as the eastern gate, the unique gate that been closed and the Lord God has entered by it while it remained shut (Ezek. 44: 1-3). And she is a betrothed virgin so no one doubts her and wrongs her when she becomes pregnant. This is what St. Ambrose said: [God did not reveal His person at the expense of the reputation of His mother].

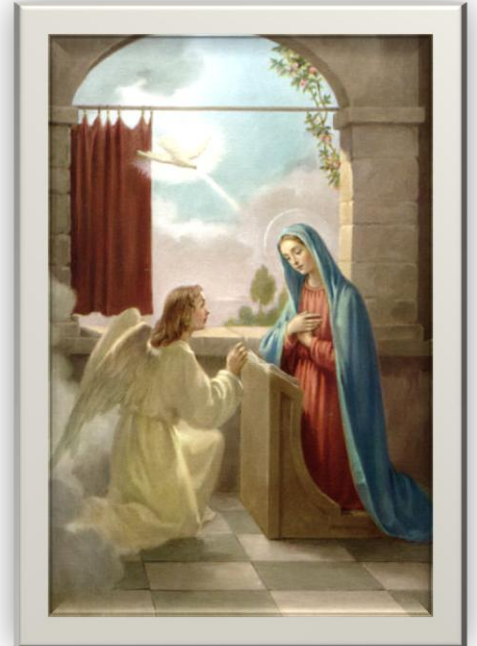
+ *“Hail to you O full of grace... you have found favor with God.”* Saint Mary completely opened her heart to God; therefore He filled her with grace. It is an unchanging rule, *the more we humbly prepare our hearts for the work of grace, the more grace we receive* and we become a blessing for many. God is always looking for a man who finds grace in His eyes, and when He finds this man, he becomes the reason for the outpour of divine grace to all those who are around him. Saint Mary who found grace in God's eyes, is the key to the New Testament, as Moses the prophet, who also found grace in the eyes of God (Exodus 33: 12-17), was the key to the Old Testament. However, there is a great difference because Moses was a blessing to one nation and gave them the word of God written on the stone, while Saint Mary is a blessing to all generations, as she gave us the incarnate word of God from her womb, and carried on her arms, Emmanuel, which means, God is with us.

+ *“How can this be, since I do not know a man?”* This question reveals that she had vowed celibacy, as she did not say: When will this be? Rather, she asked: How can this be? Unlike Zachariah, she did not doubt the word of God, rather she was wondering how this word will be fulfilled. Therefore, the same angel who gave a punishment to Zachariah calmly clarified to her the plan of the Holy trinity for the mystery of the Incarnation. *“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.”* for that reason, Saint Mary rose above Zachariah the priest in her faith according to Saint Ambrose.

+ *“Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.”* This is the moment at which the divine incarnation started. This magnificent obedience of Saint Mary is what elevated humanity once more after its fall because of the disobedience of Eve. Additionally, she did not fall in the sin of pride after the words of praise that she heard from the archangels, but rather she said that she is the maidservant of the Lord. We should notice here that God never impose Himself on us, but waits till we consent to and accept the will of God, so He starts working within us.

+ By accepting the annunciation of the divine incarnation, Saint Mary has become the first member of the Church, rather she became an inspiring role model to her. Saint Ambrose states that: As the Virgin conceived of Christ by the Holy Spirit and gave birth to Him for the world, so the Church conceived of us and gave birth to us by the Holy Spirit to become children of God.

+ Our Mother, Saint Mary, has also become a fine example for all human beings, for she is the Virgin who did not know a human seed, but accepted the divine seed, so she conceived of Christ and gave birth to him for the world. Thus, on the spiritual level, it has also become possible for each virgin soul to accept the divine seed in her heart to conceive of Christ and then offer Him to the world. This means that every soul should keep its spiritual virginity far from the seeds of the world such as money, fame, power, and lusts, and opens a humble heart to accept the divine word in complete submission, then Christ becomes formed within her and shines upon the world.



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