

Annunciation

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[0 : 0 0] Today is really the first day of Christmas, so Merry Christmas. It is the day in which the angel Gabriel announced to the blessed Virgin Mary, Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women.

And the angel went on to proclaim, Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a son and shall call his name Jesus.

He will be great and will be called the son of the highest. And the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever.

And of his kingdom, there will be no end. We often picture Mary receiving this news from the angel Gabriel with a warm glow and a deep sense of appreciation.

But the very next words we hear from this young virgin girl are, How can this be, since I do not know a man?

[1 : 1 2] Mary is shocked by this news and no doubt troubled. So she asks, How can this happen? I'm a virgin. The angel goes on to explain, 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. And then the angel Gabriel comforts Mary with those words, For with God, nothing will be impossible.

Nine months before we celebrate the nativity of our Lord, We celebrate this feast that our prayer book calls the Annunciation of Our Lady.

As we say in the creed about Jesus, He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary. And if we really think about it, if we think about the Annunciation, if we think about the shock that Mary had, this is a perfect example of our lives as it relates to Lent.

Lent is about facing the trials, the temptations, the frustrations, the uncertainties that often come in life.

[2 : 3 4] It's about contemplating death as we look to the cross as our hope and our compass throughout the trials of our life. Mary faced the ultimate trial.

She would be branded by some as a whore who did not know that she was pregnant or that she conceived from the Holy Ghost.

And she would carry the stigma of being an adulteress by some, which is punishable by death, according to the law of Moses. The reason why we celebrate this day is not only because Jesus was conceived in the womb of Mary, it's also because of what Mary said to the angel Gabriel.

Mary then proclaimed the ultimate words of faith in the midst of the greatest uncertainty. Mary said, She said, Behold, I am the maidservant of the Lord.

Let it be to me according to thy word. Let it be to me. Let it be done to me according to thy word. Mary saw her whole life as an instrument, as a tool in our Lord's hands.

[3 : 5 4] She was willing to face the difficulty and say, Whatever the Lord wills, let it happen. The reformer Martin Luther paraphrased Mary's words to say, and I quote, I, that is Mary, am but the workshop in which he, that is the Lord, performs his work.

Luther went on to extol Mary in his commentary on the Magnificat by saying, O blessed virgin mother of God, what great comfort God has shown us in you.

This exhorts us to believe that he will not despise us poor and lowly ones, but graciously regard us also according to your example.

Friends, Mary provides the example for all of us as we seek to live out our faith in the midst of uncertainty and great trials. She demonstrates the very heart of faith.

She trusted the Lord despite the sure difficulties that awaited her. And she knew that whatever the Lord willed, she would trust in him at all times and in all circumstances.

[5 : 13] She was and she is the handmaiden of the Lord. And she, along with all the faithful saints, exhort us to see ourselves in the same way.

We are called to be the humble servants of God who are willing to live out our callings with faith, trusting that our Lord, our gracious Lord will accomplish his purposes through us.

And in doing so, we, like Mary, can have great joy, even in the midst of uncertainty, hardship, and even pain.

Mary willingly said yes to God. She said yes to God, and she took on the task of being the new Eve, bearing the promised one who would be greater than Abel.

And as the new Adam, she would bring forth now the new Adam who would bring life from death.

Mary became the greater tabernacle that housed within her womb the Word made flesh.

[6 : 21] And Mary is the pinnacle of faithfulness that exhorts us to do what she told the disciples to do at the wedding of Cana.

Listen to him speaking of her son. She portrays to us perfect obedience and trust, knowing that the Lord is faithful.

He will always see us through our challenges and our trials. Therefore, we extol the handmaiden of the Lord on this day, the Annunciation of Our Lady.

We extol the handmaiden of the Lord as we follow her example of magnifying and worshiping the Lord with grace, while accepting his will, despite the challenges that we face.

And as we already sang in that great hymn, then gentle Mary meekly bowed her head. To me be as it pleaseth God, she said.

[7 : 29] My soul shall laud and magnify God's holy name. Most highly favored lady. Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Ghost.

Amen.