

**THE ANNUNCIATION OF OUR MOST HOLY LADY, THE THEOTOKOS AND
EVER-VIRGIN MARY, MARCH 25/APRIL 7, 2007**

HEBREWS 2: 11-18

ST. LUKE 1:24-38

Fr. Dr. Photios+ (W)

Gospel: *And after those days his wife Elisabeth conceived, and hid herself five months, saying,*

Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein He looked on me, to take away my reproach among men.

And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth,

To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.

And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be.

And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God.

And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call His name JESUS.

He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of his father David:

And he shall reign over the House of Jacob for ever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end.

Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?

And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.

And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren.

For with God nothing shall be impossible.

And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.

...

Saint Peter of Damaskos:

I hymn Thy birth and her who gave Thee birth: she whom Thou didst preserve a virgin after she gave birth as she was before she gave birth.

[*The Philokalia, Volume Three*, Faber and Faber Inc., London, paperback edition 1995, p. 128.]

...

Saint Maximos the Confessor:

For just as He Himself became man without changing His nature or altering His power, so He makes her who bore Him a Mother while keeping her a virgin. In this way He reveals one miracle through another miracle, at the same time concealing the one with the other. This is because in Himself, according to His essence, God always remains a mystery. He expresses His natural hiddenness in such a way that He makes it the more hidden through the revelation. Similarly, in the case of the Virgin who bore Him, He made her a Mother in such a way that by conceiving Him the bonds of her virginity became even more indissoluble.

[*The Philokalia, Volume Two*, Faber and Faber Inc., London, paperback edition 1990, p. 166.]

God's Messenger, the Archangel Gabriel, Arrives

Elisabeth, wife of Zacharias, was with child, who was to be the last and greatest of the Prophets, John the Baptist, Forerunner of the Lord. She hid herself for five months because of conceiving in her old age. When Mary conceived, the Baptist leapt in Elisabeth's womb and she no longer hid herself becoming emboldened because her child, even before his birth, was honoured to be a prophet.¹

During her sixth month, after John's conception, God sent the Archangel Gabriel to Nazareth, a Galilean city, to appear to Mary, a virgin espoused to the much older Joseph of the House of David. Since she was betrothed to Joseph, "She too was descended from the tribe and lineage of David."² This fulfilled the law requiring husband and wife to be of the "same tribe and lineage".³

Blessed Art Thou Among Women

God chose Mary to be the vessel of Incarnation. This, alone, should cause all Christians to esteem her greatly. She had prepared herself in the Temple since her early youth. Mary was the daughter of Joachim and Anna. In her early years (when she was three), her parents had given her to the Temple to fulfill Anna's vow to the angel recorded in *The Protoevangelion of James*:

And, behold, an angel of the Lord stood by, saying: 'Anna, Anna, the Lord hath heard thy prayer and thou shalt conceive, and bring forth; and thy seed shall be spoken of in all the world.' And Anna said: 'As the Lord my God liveth, if I beget either male or female, I will bring it as a gift to the Lord my God; and it shall minister to Him in holy things all the days of its life.'⁴

Mary lived in the temple for 10 years dedicating herself to God. She vowed never to marry.⁵ Joseph received Mary from the high priest of the Temple in her early teens because she could no longer stay at the Temple. Her parents had died and she needed to get married in light of having no home to return to; however, the high priest wanted to help her keep her vow of virginity. Thus he entrusted her to Joseph, known as the righteous, telling him:

Thou hast been chosen by lot to take into thy keeping the *virgin* (emphasis supplied) of the Lord...⁶

The Protoevangelium of James (c. 150 A.D.) is attributable to St. James the Just of Jerusalem, First Bishop of the Church and natural son of Joseph, who was Jesus' foster father. It ends:

And I James that wrote this history in Jerusalem, a commotion having arisen when Herod died, withdrew myself to the wilderness until the commotion in Jerusalem ceased, glorifying the Lord God, Who had given me the gift and wisdom to write this history. And grace shall be with them that fear our Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom be glory to ages of ages. Amen.⁷

The Lord Shall Take Flesh in the Virgin's Womb

Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.

Mary was troubled by this salutation. God's messenger, the angel, calmed her, explaining she was not to fear, she had found favour and was pleasing to God. The angel's words had never been heard before: "no other virgin has been deemed worthy".⁸ The Conceived One, Who was to

be called Jesus, Whose name in Greek meant “salvation from God,” the interpretation of Jesus being “Saviour”. Note that as great as John the Forerunner was to be, he was not the “Son of the Most High”. Jesus, the human son of the Virgin, is the Son of the Most High. Remember:

Even *before the ages* the Word was the Son of the Most High, although He was not called or known as such. But when He became incarnate and appeared in the flesh, *then* He was called the Son of the Most High, Who has appeared and works wonders (emphases supplied).⁹

From the Virgin, “He formed a temple for Himself; He became a perfect Man, that He might make man a God.”¹⁰ We are to fashion our behaviour to emulate Christ because that is desired spiritual destiny: deification in His Image.

The Meaning of the Throne of David and the House of Jacob

“The Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David: and He shall reign over the House of Jacob for ever;...” “Throne of David” does not mean an *earthly* one as we would understand; rather, it is a “divine kingship”. The House of Jacob:

...refers to the universal Church, which through its faith and confession of Christ pertains to the heritage of the patriarchs, either among those who took their physical stock from the stock of the patriarchs, or among those who, though brought forth with respect to the flesh from other countries, were reborn in Christ by the spiritual washing.¹¹

It includes believing Jews and believers of *other* nations. Both sets of believers “are *Jacob* [before he encountered God] and *Israel* [the same man after he saw God]”.¹²

David foreshadowed Christ. He was persecuted by Saul for good works, and the Lord was persecuted for His miracles. “David conquered and reigned through meekness;” Christ in meekness “accepted the Cross and ruled as King”.¹³ The Lord’s Divine Kingship, exercised in meekness and humility, was not the kind of kingship expected by unbelieving Jews. Christ received a spiritual kingdom having no end [as David received a physical one]:

There shall be no end to the Kingdom of Christ, that is, no end to the knowledge of God or to Christianity. For when we are persecuted, we shine with the grace of Christ.¹⁴

Mary queries the Angel

“How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?”

Mary was not querying from a position of doubt. She didn’t lack faith in the angel’s holy disclosure but inquired how it was to be accomplished.¹⁵ Note that although she was betrothed to Joseph “she had the intention, *though betrothed of remaining a virgin* (emphasis supplied)”.¹⁶

The Meaning of “overshadow thee” and “virginal”

What is meant by the overshadowing of Mary involves the dwelling of the Logos of God in Mary. The Holy Spirit shall come upon her “rendering thy womb fertile, and creating flesh for the Word Which is one in essence with the Father”. Christ/Son of God/Power of God shall overshadow her, taking the Virgin completely within His spiritual wings.¹⁷ According to Saint Gregory Palamas, this event was more than an overshadowing “but an outright union “when the incarnate Logos of God was formed “from both the powers of the *Most High* and the all-holy *virginal* womb. Thus, in an *indescribable* manner, the Logos of God took up His dwelling in her” (emphases supplied).¹⁸

Virginal means what it says. Shame on those modernists who pridefully dispute the Virgin Birth and/or assert that there was a time when the Ever-Virgin Mother of God had sexual relations with Joseph.

The Meaning of the Annunciation, in Short

The Archangel Gabriel appeared to the Virgin Mary to fulfill Isaiah’s ancient prophecy “that a Virgin would conceive in Her Womb and give birth to a Son, Who would be called Emmanuel, meaning ‘God is with us’ (Is. 7:14)...” The purpose of God becoming man was to free the world from sin and the devil’s power.¹⁹

The Virgin Mary’s example of faith and obedience should be inspirational to us all. Her firm belief, her faith in God’s message delivered by the angel Gabriel, rings out in her words “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to Thy word.” Blessed Theophylact comments that she was the Lord’s to do with as He wished “I am a writer’s tablet; let the Writer write upon it whatever He wishes. Let the Lord do as He wills.”²⁰ Mary obeyed and through her faith and obedience received God’s grace. Her agreement, so essential as an exercise in spiritual freedom from God, became our vehicle for salvation. She humbly accepted God’s choice and courageously went on. We too need to voluntarily accept our God-given freedom to choose His Way or the highway. Which will we choose?

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

¹ Bl. Theophylact’s *Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to Saint Luke, Vol. III* in the series, Bl. Theophylact’s *Explanation of the New Testament* (tr. from the original Greek by Fr. Christopher Stade), Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1997, p. 14.

² *id.*, pp. 14-15.

³ *id.*, p. 15.

⁴ St. James the Just, *The Protoevangelion of James*, c. 150 A.D., p. 1 of 5 at <http://www.philthompson.net/pages/library/prot-evangelion.htm>.

⁵ Bishop Alexander (Mileant), *The Feast of ANNUNCIATION The Beginning of Our Salvation, The Event of Annunciation*, Missionary Leaflet #41, Holy Trinity Orthodox Mission, La Canada, CA, 2003, p. 2 of 13 at http://www.fatheralexander.org/booklets/english/blagov_e.htm.

⁶ *The Protoevangelium of James*, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

⁷ *id.*, p. 5.

⁸ Blessed Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

⁹ *id.*, p. 16.

¹⁰ Hieromonk German Ciuba (tr. from the Slavonic into English; tr. from the original Greek into Slavonic in the year 6851, A.D. 1343), *The Gospel Commentary*, Russian Orthodox Church of the Nativity of Christ (Old Rite), Erie, PA, 2002, p. 773.

¹¹ St. Bede, Homily 1.3, In Advent, *Homilies on the Gospels, Bk. One, 23*, quoted in Endnote 11, St. Luke 1:33, p. 295 in *The Orthodox New Testament, The Holy Gospels, Volume 1* (Second Edition/ Revised and Enlarged), Holy Apostles Convent/Dormition Skete, Buena Vista, CO, 2000.

¹² Blessed Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

¹³ *id.*

¹⁴ *id.*

¹⁵ *The Orthodox New Testament, The Holy Gospels*, St. Luke, *op. cit.*, citing St. Bede, Homily 1.3, In Advent, *Homilies on the Gospels, Bk. One, 24*, Endnote 12, St. Luke 1:34, p. 295.

¹⁶ *id.*, quoting St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Nativity of Christ*, P.G. 46 1140D-1141C.

¹⁷ Blessed Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

¹⁸ *The Orthodox New Testament, Holy Gospels*, *op. cit.*, Saint Gregory Palamas, *Homily 37, On the Dormition*, P.G. 151, 461D, as quoted in Endnote 13, St. Luke 1:35, pp. 295-296.

¹⁹ For a cogent discussion, see Bishop Alexander (Mileant), *op. cit.*, p. 4.

²⁰ Blessed Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 18.