

## 4-7-19 The Annunciation

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

Typically on the average year, the average or common Lent and experience on this Sunday, we are focused on Saint John of the Ladder, Saint John Climacus, the author of the incredible book *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, so that after having rested under the cross last week, last Sunday being the Sunday of the cross, having been under the protection of the cross this week, contemplating the crucifixion of Christ, his saving power for us, the sanctification and the empowering of the cross itself, having a relic of the true cross with us.

That then we come to this Sunday typically with Saint John Climacus and we see in the spiritual instruction that he gives us how to take up our cross, what to really do. What does it mean to deny ourselves and pick up our cross and follow Christ, to follow Christ, to be a Christian?

Yet, in God's providence this year the Feast of the Annunciation, the announcement of the archangel Gabriel to Mary that she would give birth to the Christ, falls on this Sunday.

As you know, during Lent, depending on when [inaudible 00:01:33] falls, when Lent occurs, the annunciation feast can fall at different times during Lent. We had, in God's providence, that the feast falls today.

Instead of focusing on the cross itself we focus on, in a sense, what enabled Christ to come, his ... God's desire and will that salvation come from cooperation between man and God, that although God is omnipotent, does whatever he wills, he has created human beings in his image with free will and a rational power, things that make us like a god, some of the things that make us in his image, in the image of the holy trinity.

We find that although God can do whatever he wills, he has the power and the authority to do it, he insists, insists on our cooperation. He insists on it. Although God can save anyone that he wills, he will not save anyone who does not want to be saved, who does not ask to be saved or invite him in when he knocks at the door of the heart.

In the celebration of Gabriel's annunciation to the [inaudible 00:02:56], the mother of God, we see the beginning of this relationship between God and man that will change everything. It'll change every understanding from the Old Testament as to who God really is in his nature and what his relationship is going to be with mankind, and the synergy, the cooperation between man and God that will lead to not only the salvation of the individual person but the salvation of all who call upon his name.

In the liturgical year, if you'll remember, we begin the liturgical year in the fall with the feast of the nativity of the [inaudible 00:03:40]. We end the liturgical year with [inaudible 00:03:44], her death, because by recognizing the life of the [inaudible 00:03:53] we recognize the greatest thing that God has done for us, which is that he has become man.

As God, the uncircumscribable, he who cannot be measured, who has no size, who is infinite, allows himself by his will and the cooperation of a person to be circumscribed, to be contained in her womb.

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This true [inaudible 00:04:28], this incredible, pure, godly condescension to man is preserved with our awareness being on what he has done. If we focus only on the cross, the crucifixion, and the resurrection, which of course are central to everything that God has planned in this mission of his son incarnate, if we only focus on those things we will eventually forget the true miracle, the true love, the true mercy that God extends to the human race.

By remembering that God came to Mary, and that he choose to dwell contained, confined in her womb for our salvation, we see the reality of his relationship with mankind that is going to make the crucifixion and the resurrection even more profound.

We heard last night a few of the prophecies of the coming of the mother of God. We heard from the Old Testament prophecies about the gate that only God would pass through. This refers particularly to Mary and to her virginity. We also heard the story of the vision of Jacob and the ladder, the ladder between Earth and Heaven upon which the angles are ascending and descending, which we see as a prophecy as the mother of God.

I listened very carefully to the words last night because I wanted to share this with you this morning. It says in the vision of Jacob that a ladder was set up on Earth and the top of it reached to Heaven. This is not a ladder that was extended down from Heaven to Earth. This is a ladder that was from Earth extending up to Heaven.

Something human, something earthly in this vision of Jacob's. Something earthbound, earth created, man created, an effort that man made, has made, the construction of a ladder. It extends up and connects us to Heaven. God uses that ladder. His angels are ascending and descending on it.

The apostolic teaching of this prophecy is this is Mary, that the world ... Every righteous effort of the entire human race throughout all of the Old Testament period of time culminates in offering her up as the person that is going to connect us with God. She is a human. She is not God.

Compared to God, she is just like us, but compared to us she is the greatest of the saints and the mother of god, and the very first Christian.

When we talk about the annunciation of Gabriel to Mary we have to remember that in the original language that word, annunciation ... We talk about announcing things clearly, we make ... Talk about making an announcement, but in Greek that word is the evangelization. Gabriel comes to Mary to evangelize her.

In that word we get two meanings. One of them is appropriately translated as an annunciation or a proclamation, which is that an evangelization is the proclaiming of good news, the proclaiming of the gospel. It's another word that means good news, but it has action behind it. It's good news that's arriving in your life.

When we evangelize as christians we are going around and we are sharing with others, we are proclaiming with others the good news of the gospel. We are evangelizing other people.

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When the archangel Gabriel comes to Mary he is also evangelizing her not only with proclaiming the good news that Christ will come through her, but he is converting her to Christ. Is she not the first Christian? Is she not the first person to find out that the Christ has come, that the savior has arrived, that he is the son of God, as the angel tells her?

She receives him not only into her mind and her faith and her heart, but in her womb. She submits not only to him as the savior, but she submits to him to do whatever he wills. This has been ... When we find from the apostolic tradition in the life of the [inaudible 00:09:18] we find that this is what has made her different all throughout her life is not ... She's any different from everybody else in being told what the laws of God are, being proclaimed, the commandments of God, but also she did them.

It is our understanding that she is the fulfillment of all of the righteous of the Old Testament, that every righteous person, every prophet, every seer of God in the Old Testament failed to some degree to keep the law perfectly. Then, Mary comes along, growing up in the temple from a very young age, communing with God and keeping his commandments to whatever degree is voluntary, perfectly.

We do not believe that she was not affected by the fall. We believe that she was affected by the fall, like we are. We believe that she had free will like we have. We believe that she was educated in the commandments of God as we have been also. We also believe that voluntarily she actually kept all of those commandments day to day. It made her able to be the one that God chooses to be incarnate in the world for our salvation.

We sang several times this morning in [inaudible 00:10:44] that today is the beginning of the celebration of our salvation with the annunciation of Gabriel. We are not saved by Mary, we are saved by Christ, but this is the beginning of the entire story. Proverbs tells us that when we see the thing that we are longing for on the horizon hope arises in our heart.

Although the Christ has not yet been born, and Christ's ministry has not begun, he has not been crucified, he has not resurrected yet, but we see what is coming. The joy and the celebration of salvation coming to us through Jesus Christ, our Lord, begins now with Mary standing and conversing with the angel and saying, "Yes, although it defies logic what you're telling me is going to happen, although I am unworthy of what is going to happen, I believe in God and I trust God, and I obey God. You are telling me what he is going to do, so let it be done." She's the first christian. She is the first to follow Christ.

It is also very applicable that during this time of lent when we are talking much about reversing the effects of the fall that God's plan ... God never makes a plan that doesn't get fulfilled. You know that? From our perspective, he has plan A and plan B. Plan A was Adam and Eve are in the garden. They obey him always. The Garden of Eden expands to cover the entire earth, and every human being is holy. That's plan A.

Plan B is a lot different, isn't it? From our perspective, everything messed up from the very beginning, and we contribute to it daily. That's our experience. God's plan is plan A, it is plan B.

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It is plan B from the beginning. He knows everything that's going to happen. He is omniscient. He knows everything. He foresees everything.

Yet, he in his love and his mercy allows what's going to happen to happen. He grants Adam and Eve free will, even though he knows ahead of time they are going to sin. He knows he is going to send his son. He knows that death is going to have to be conquered to get us into paradise because he told Adam and Eve, and nothing he says is not true. He told them, "If you eat, you will die." That comes true in our own death, but death has now been transformed by Christ.

In paradise, in the garden, think of this, a man without a woman gives birth to a woman. Through a tree everything is destroyed. Everything is fallen. Now, with Mary, through a woman without a man, a man is going to come into the world. Through the tree of the cross everything is going to be made right again.

Plan A was that a man and a woman through a tree would save the world, and it's happening anyway. It's happening despite the fall of Adam and Eve. There is a new Adam and a new Eve.

From the wonderful essay by Father Michael [Polski 00:14:11] on the mother of God, there is a few wonderful comparisons between Mary and Eve that I want to share with you today as we celebrate her accepting voluntarily to be a Christian and to bring Christ in the flesh into the world.

Father Michael says, "Then in the past with Eve there was a manifestation of a fallen angel, the serpent, the devil, and yet now with Mary there is a manifestation of a holy angel, Gabriel. The first, the fallen angel, promised Eve that through her man would become as gods. He says to her, "You shall be as gods."

The second Gabriel promised Mary that through her God would become man. He shall be called the Son of the Most High, the Son of God, Emanuel, which being interpreted is God With Us.

Through Eve came the fall. Through Mary comes salvation. When Eve was deluded and desired to be as God she was not made God. Now, God is made man so that man can in reality become divine.

First of all, Mary does so in whom he came into her, the divinity dwelling within her as being the first of all the race of men and all christians. The woman was the first to fall and the woman was the first to be saved.

Eve was shown as one who did not trust God's commandments, who did not believe God, and who longed to receive deification by her own empirical knowledge. She debates with the serpent as to decide herself whether or not it is worth disobeying God in order to become like a god.

Mary, however, trusted God completely. In the faith that she had she rejected human knowledge, saying, "I don't know a man," and yet accepting it was not necessary to know one. She said, "Be it done to me according to your word."

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In the past, there was the fall with Eve, and through doubt and unbelief all people are fallen. Yet, now there is salvation in Mary. Through her faith in Christ, salvation comes to all people. Eve showed disobedience to God and his commandments when he said to her, "You shall not eat of the tree," but she took the tree, the fruit of the tree, and ate it.

Mary was obedient to the will of God at the annunciation from the archangel Gabriel and without any doubt she said, "Behold the hand made of the Lord."

We celebrate with joy. It's a fish day, by the way. Another reason to be happy. We celebrate this day in the middle of Lent, in the middle of the [inaudible 00:17:37] we are practicing, the fasting we are practicing, the increased prayers that we are practicing, the increased learning and application of the spiritual life to ourselves, to our faith in Christ, to our neighbor who we love.

We have a time of joy. God is going to save mankind, whom he loves, by whatever means he wills and we cooperate with. He is our savior. He alone brings us into paradise and allows us to be adopted to his father as sons and daughters of God.

Yet, our celebration includes always the life of the mother of God because if she had not been the first Christian we would not have the opportunity to be Christians as well. If she had not invited Christ not only into her heart, but into her womb, the incarnation would not have occurred.

God allows, although he can do whatever he wills, he allows the cooperation of man and woman to affect history, salvation, eternity, our relationship with him, so we give glory to God who is merciful and loving. We give honor to his holy mother who is the first Christian and she who by her cooperation sets the supreme example as what it means to be a human in relationship with God. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.