

Annunciation of the Lord
Homily of Bishop Barres
St. Agnes Cathedral
December 20, 2022

We marvel at God’s plan for saving us. We know the plan well, yet we can never cease to be in awe of it.

For “though once we were lost and could not approach [him],”¹ in his goodness, God “came in mercy to the aid of all,”² and sent his Only Begotten Son to be our Savior.

Today the Lord’s coming is announced. St. Luke relates the good news in the Gospel. It unfolds as the angel Gabriel is sent to Nazareth, to the Virgin betrothed to Joseph. The angel tells Mary something stupendous: She will conceive and bear a son by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit.

With this announcement – and Our Lady’s humility before God’s will - the prophesy of Isaiah is fulfilled. Her son will be Emmanuel, God-with-us. He will be great, called Son of the Most High, and through his love to the end on the Cross, we will have life and have it to the full.

In a homily from the Office of Readings for today, St. Bernard of Clairvaux comments on the scene of the Annunciation. He writes: “Answer quickly, O Virgin. Reply in haste to the angel, or rather through the angel to the Lord. Answer with a word, receive the Word of God. Speak your own word, conceive the divine Word. Breathe a passing word, embrace the eternal Word. Why do you delay, why are you afraid? Believe, give praise, and receive. Let humility be bold...Arise in faith, hasten in devotion, open in praise and thanksgiving. *Behold the handmaid of the Lord*, she says, *be it done to me according to your word.*”

With the angel’s appearance, this good news breaks from on high. God’s plan is set in motion, and with Mary, we marvel that *nothing is impossible for God*.

We ponder the privileged place of Our Lady in God’s design for salvation history.

¹ “Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation I,” *Roman Missal*, 2011.

² “Eucharistic Prayer IV,” *Roman Missal*, 2011.

Consider this text from the *Act of Consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary* that we prayed last March 25th, 2022 on the Solemnity of the Annunciation with the Holy Father in Rome and Catholics all over the world. It reads: “Mother of God and our Mother, in your Immaculate Heart, we solemnly entrust and consecrate ourselves, the Church and all humanity, especially Russia and Ukraine. Accept this act that we carry out with confidence and love. Grant that war may end and peace spread throughout the world. The ‘Fiat’ that arose from your heart opened the doors of history to the Prince of Peace. We trust that, through your heart, peace will dawn once more. To you we consecrate the future of the whole human family, the needs and expectations of every people, the anxieties and hopes of the world.”

As we see from this powerful and beautiful *Act of Consecration*, Mary’s place is unique. For in desiring to reconcile all things to himself, God chose the Blessed Virgin Mary as the vessel through which to take flesh and enter our human condition.

Mary is *full of grace* and has indeed *found favor with God*. Conceived without sin, she was prepared for this moment.

In this wonderful Annunciation scene, she hears in faith Gabriel’s message, and by the power of her “yes,” everything is reborn in an instant. God takes flesh in her womb; the Savior dwells among us; and the trajectory of history is altered forever.

In saying her gracious words - *may it be done to me* - Mary assumes her singular role as *Theotokos*, God-bearer.

Today, let us remember that “the ‘Fiat’ that arose from [her] heart opened the doors of history to the *Prince of Peace*.”³ “Lovingly she bore him in her immaculate womb,”⁴ so that Christ could give his peace, one which the world cannot give (cf. Jn. 14:27). Through her, the Prince of Peace comes.

In being the Mother of God, Mary becomes our mother. For as God was given to her, so was she given to us.

We understand this gift. Indeed, how often, like the couple at Cana, do we feel Mary’s maternal care and powerful intercession?

As we celebrate the announcement of the Lord’s coming, we remember, too, Mary’s privileged role. We recall her closeness and ceaseless intercession.

³ Pope Francis, *Act of Consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary*, March 25, 2022. (Emphasis added.)

⁴ “Preface: The Mystery of the Incarnation,” *Roman Missal*, 2011.

Let us turn to the Blessed Virgin Mary with great love and affection. Let us remember with her that *nothing is impossible for God*.