

left to her! Mary bows down before this sovereign will, and says to the heavenly messenger: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord: be it done to me according to thy word."

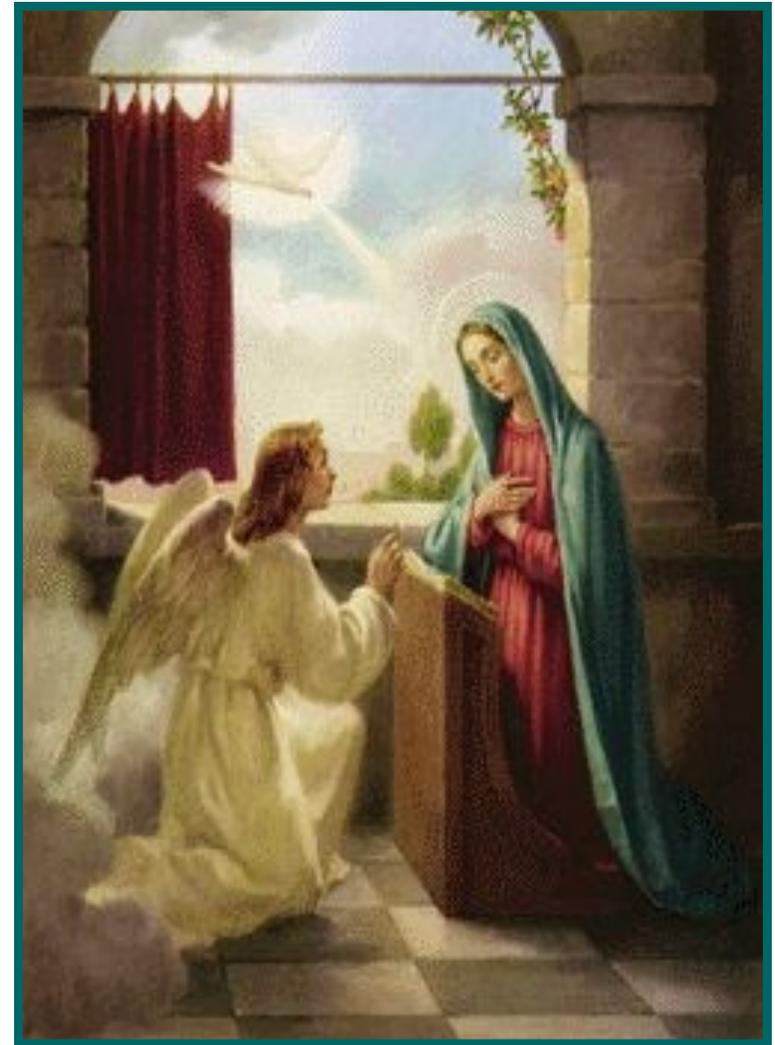
Thus, as the great St. Irenaeus and so many of the holy fathers remark, the obedience of the second Eve repaired the disobedience of the first: for no sooner does the Virgin of Nazareth speak her *fiat*, "be it done," than the eternal Son of God (who according to the divine decree, awaited this word) is present, by the operation of the Holy Ghost, in the chaste womb of Mary, and there He begins His human life. A Virgin is a Mother, and Mother of God; and it is this Virgin's consenting to the Divine Will that has made her conceive by the power of the Holy Ghost. This sublime mystery puts between the eternal Word and a mere woman the relations of Son and Mother; it gives to the almighty God a means whereby He may, in a manner worthy of His majesty, triumph over Satan, who hitherto seemed to have prevailed against the divine plan.

Never was there a more entire or humiliating defeat than that which this day befell Satan. The frail creature, over whom he had so easily triumphed at the beginning of the world, now rises and crushes his proud head. Eve conquers in Mary. God would not choose man for the instrument of His vengeance; the humiliation of Satan would not have been great enough; and therefore she who was the first prey of hell, the first victim of the tempter, is selected to give battle to the enemy. The result is so glorious a triumph that Mary is to be superior not only to the rebel angels, but to the whole human race, yea, to the angels of heaven. Seated on her exalted throne, she, the Mother of God, is to be the Queen of all creation. Satan, in the depths of the abyss, will eternally bewail his having dared to direct his first attack against the woman, for God has now so gloriously avenged her; and in heaven, the very Cherubim and Seraphim reverently look up to Mary, and deem themselves honored when she smiles upon them, or employs them in the execution of any of her wishes, for she is the Mother of their God.

Therefore is it that we, the children of Adam, who have been snatched by Mary's obedience from the power of hell, solemnize this day of the Annunciation. Well may we say of Mary those words of Debbora, when she sang her song of victory over the enemies of God's people: "The valiant men ceased, and rested in Israel, until Debbora arose, a mother arose in Israel. The Lord chose new wars, and He Himself overthrew the gates of the enemies" (Judges 5:7-8). Let us also refer to the holy Mother of Jesus these words of Judith, who by her victory over the enemy was another type of Mary: "Praise ye the Lord our God, who hath not forsaken them that hope in Him. And by me, His handmaid, He hath fulfilled His mercy, which He promised to the house of Israel; and he hath killed the enemy of His people by my hand this night... The almighty Lord hath struck him, and hath delivered him into the hands of a woman, and hath slain him." (Judith 13:17-18; 16:7)

* (excerpted from: www.tldm.org)

The Annunciation



*"And the angel being come in, said unto her:
Hail, full of grace,
the Lord is with thee:
blessed art thou among women."*

St. Luke 1:28

The Annunciation

A Meditation

by Dom Gueranger, O.S.B.

**A tradition, which has come down from the apostolic ages, tells us that the great mystery of the Incarnation was achieved on the twenty-fifth day of March (St. Augustine, De Trinitate, Lib. iv, cap. v). It was at the hour of midnight, when the most holy Virgin was alone and absorbed in prayer, that the Archangel Gabriel appeared before her, and asked her, in the name of the blessed Trinity, to consent to become the Mother of God. Let us assist, in spirit, at this wonderful interview between the angel and the Virgin: and, at the same time, let us think of that other interview which took place between Eve and the serpent. A holy bishop and martyr of the second century, Saint Irenaeus who had received the tradition from the very disciples of the apostles, shows us that Nazareth is the counterpart of Eden (Adv. haereses, Lib. v, cap. xix).*

In the garden of delights there is a virgin and an angel: and a conversation takes place between them. At Nazareth a virgin is also addressed by an angel, and she answers him; but the angel of the earthly paradise is a spirit of darkness, and he of Nazareth is a spirit of light. In both instances it is the angel that has the first word, "Why," said the serpent to Eve, "hath God commanded you, that you should not eat of every tree of paradise?" His question implies impatience and a solicitation to evil; he has contempt for the frail creature to whom he addresses it, but he hates the image of God which is upon her.

See, on the other hand, the angel of light; see with what composure and peacefulness he approaches the Virgin of Nazareth, the new Eve; and how respectfully he bows himself down before her; "Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with thee! Blessed art thou among women!" Such language is evidently of heaven: none but an angel could speak thus to Mary.

Eve imprudently listens to the tempter's words; she answers him; she enters into conversation with one that dares to ask her to question the justice of God's commands. Her curiosity urges her on. She has no mistrust in the serpent; this leads her to mistrust her Creator.

Mary hears what Gabriel has spoken to her; but this most prudent virgin is silent. She is surprised at the praise given her by the angel. The purest and humblest of virgins has a dread of flattery; and the heavenly messenger receives no reply from her, until he has fully explained his mission by these words: "Fear not, Mary, for thou has found favor with God. Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a Son: and thou shalt call His name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of David His father: and He shall reign in the house of David His father: and He shall reign in the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there shall be no end."

What magnificent promises are these, which are made to her in the name of God! What higher glory could she, a daughter of Juda, desire, knowing, as she does that the fortunate Mother of the Messiah is to be the object of the greatest veneration? And yet it tempts her not. She has forever consecrated her virginity to God, in order that she may be the more closely united to Him by love. The grandest possible privilege, if it is to be on the condition of violating this sacred vow, would be less than nothing in her estimation. She thus answers the angel: "How shall this be done? Because I know not man."

The first Eve evinces no such prudence or disinterestedness. No sooner has the wicked spirit assured her that she may break the commandment of her divine Benefactor and not die; that the fruit of her disobedience will be a wonderful knowledge, than she immediately yields; she is conquered. Her self-love has made her at once forget both duty and gratitude: she is delighted at the thought of being freed from the twofold tie which binds her to her Creator.

Such is the woman that caused our perdition. But how different is she that was to save us! The former cares not for her posterity; she looks but to her own interests: the latter forgets herself to think only of her God, and of the claims He has to her service. The angel, charmed with this sublime fidelity, thus answers the question put to him by Mary, and reveals to her the designs of God: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee. And therefore also the Holy which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. And behold thy cousin Elizabeth, she also hath conceived a son in her old age; and this is the sixth month with her that is called barren; because no word shall be impossible with God." This is said, he is silent, and reverently awaits the answer of the Virgin of Nazareth.

Let us look once more at the virgin of Eden. Scarcely has the wicked serpent finished speaking that Eve casts a longing look at the forbidden fruit: she is impatient to enjoy the independence it is to bring her. She rashly stretches forth her hand; she plucks the fruit; she eats it, and death takes possession of her; death of the soul, for sin extinguishes the light of life; and death of the body, which, being separated from the source of immortality, becomes an object of shame and horror, and finally crumbles into dust.

But let us turn away our eyes from this sad spectacle, and fix them on Nazareth. Mary has heard the angel's explanation of the mystery; the will of heaven is made known to her, and how grand an honor it is to bring upon her! She, the humble maid of Nazareth, is to have the ineffable happiness of becoming the Mother of God, and yet the treasure of her virginity is to be