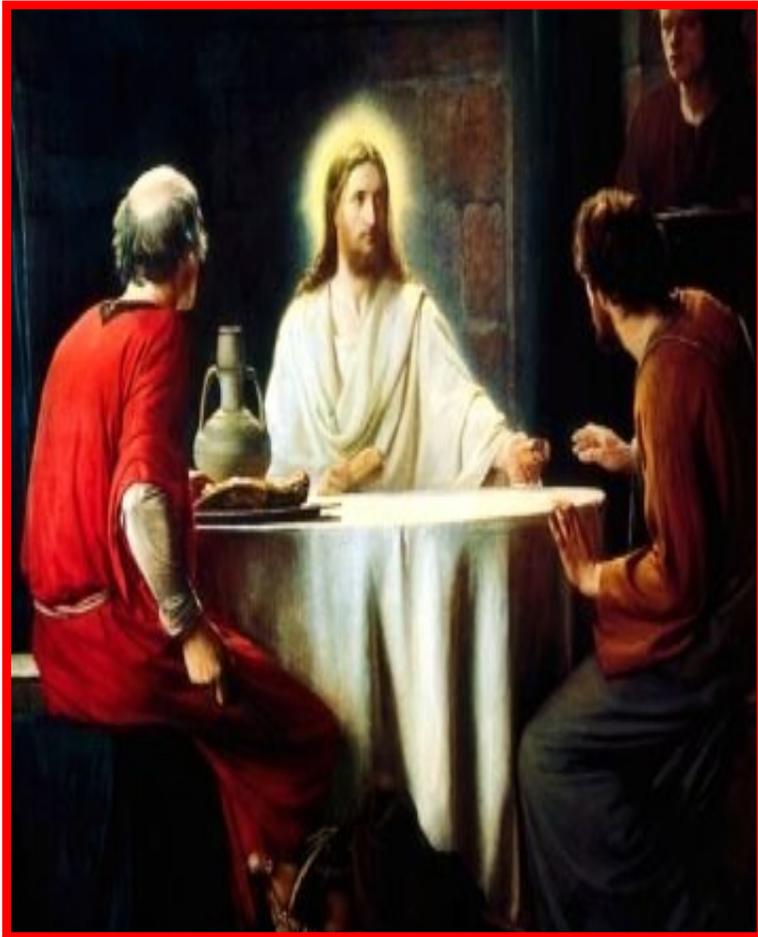


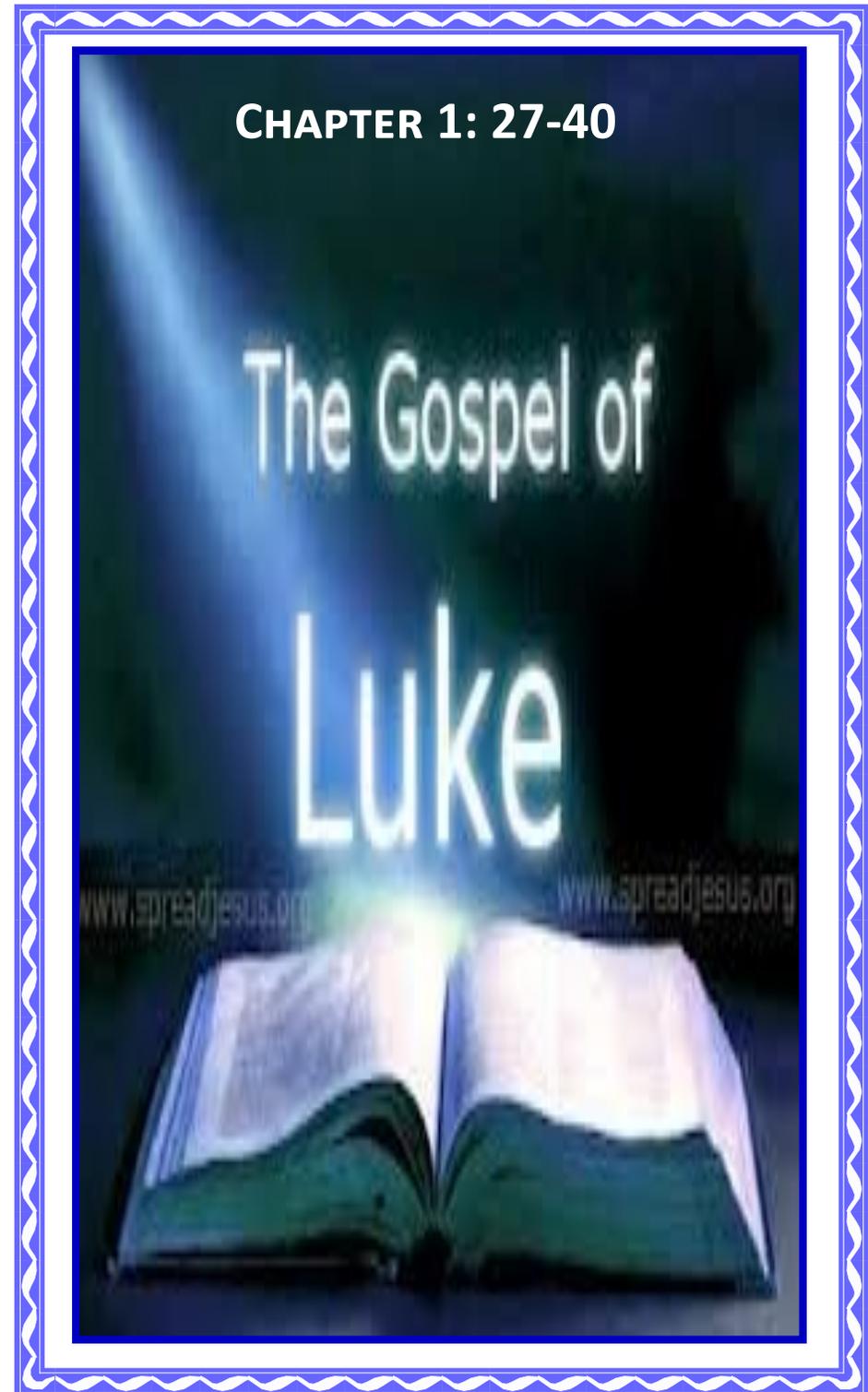
And saluted Elizabeth, with the usual Hebrew salutation. Peace be to thee. God intended by means of Elizabeth, being a matron advanced in years, to make known to the world the conception of the Virgin, and the secret Incarnation of the Word that had taken place in her.

Elizabeth. Not Zacharias; both because he was deaf, and because it was not becoming that a man should be saluted by the Virgin. Moreover; S. Ambrose says, "She was the first to give her salutation; for the more chaste a virgin is, the more humble she ought to be, and the more ready to give way to her elders. Let her then be the mistress of humility in whom is the profession of chastity."

Ver. 40.—No commentary given for this verse.



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For the Catholic Church, God's Revelation is found in Sacred Tradition, understood as God's Revealed Word handed down by the Living Teaching Authority established by Christ in the Church. That includes both Written Tradition (Scripture) and Unwritten Tradition received from Christ and handed down Orally by the Apostles and their Successors. The Church founded by Christ on Peter, and only that Church, has been Empowered by Christ to 'Interpret' His Teaching Authoritatively in His Name.

Scripture is *Inspired*; *Inspiration* really means that God Himself is the Chief Author of the Scriptures. He uses a Human Agent, in so marvelous a way that the Human writes what the Holy Spirit wants him to write, does so without Error, yet the Human Writer is Free, and keeps his own Style of Language. It is only because God is *Transcendent that He can do this - insure Freedom from Error, while leaving the Human Free. To say He is Transcendent means that He is above and beyond all our Human Classifications and Categories.*

Luke's gospel is a compilation of various interviews with eye-witnesses and close followers of Jesus (Luke 1:1-4). The author, Luke, probably did not become a Christian until several years after the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. He is first mentioned (implicitly) in Acts 16:10 (Acts is another book of the New Testament which Luke wrote). He did not, therefore, meet Jesus in the flesh and he himself was not an eye-witness.

Considered one of the most important Catholic theologians and Bible commentators, Cornelius à Lapide's, S.J. writings on the Bible, created a Scripture Commentary so complete and scholarly that it was practically the universal commentary in use by Catholics for over 400 years. Fr. Lapide's most excellent commentaries have been widely known for successfully combining piety and practicality. Written during the time of the Counter Reformation, it includes plenty of apologetics. His vast knowledge is only equaled by his piety and holiness.

Continuation of Luke 1: 27-40

Ver. 27.—*To a Virgin espoused to a man, &c.* Espoused, not by betrothal only but by matrimony already contracted, although not actually consummated, see Matt. i 18. S. Gregory Thaumasius (*Serm. 3 de Annun.*) says, “Gabriel is sent to prepare a chamber worthy of the most pure Bridegroom; he is sent to contract espousals between the creature and the Creator.” Also S. Bernard (*Serm 1 de Assump.*) well says, “There is no place in the world of greater dignity than the temple of the virginal womb in which Mary conceived the Son of God, nor in heaven is there any place of higher dignity than the royal throne on which her Son has exalted Mary.” And in *Serm. 4*, “What angelic purity even may we venture to compare with that virginity, which was worthy of becoming the shrine of the Holy Spirit, and the abode of the Son of God.”

Wherefore, under the title of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin, many congregations have been instituted for visiting the poor and the sick, and those in prison, and recently under this title S. Francis of Sales, Bishop of Geneva, has instituted a congregation of religious women, who are well known throughout France, for ministering to the sick.

To the hill country. That is Hebron, according to Baronius and others; or the hill country of Judæa.

Tropologically, the soul filled with God, as the soul of the Blessed Virgin was, ascends the mountain heights, *i.e.*, toils up the steep paths of virtue. “The Word having been conceived in the mind,” Bede says, “we must ascend to the heights of virtue along the way of love; and the city of Judah, *i.e.* of confession and praise, must be reached by us; and in the perfection of faith, hope, and love, we must abide there for three months.”

With haste. S. Ambrose mentions as the first cause of her haste that she might not tarry long out of the house in the public ways. “Learn, ye virgins, not to loiter in the streets, nor mingle in any public talk.” He also adds a second reason, because she was full of joy and the Holy Spirit; “the grace of the Holy Spirit knows nothing of slow endeavours.”

Origen gives a third reason, because Christ in the womb of the Virgin was hastening to cleanse John from original sin, and to sanctify him. “For Mary,” says S. Ambrose, “who before dwelt alone in the secret of her chamber, neither virgin modesty caused to shrink from the public gaze, nor the rugged mountains from fulfilling her purpose, nor the length of the journey from performing her duty.”

To a city of Judah. Jerusalem, according to Albertus Magnus and S. Bonaventura; but Jerusalem is generally mentioned by name, Jerusalem also is in the tribe of Benjamin, not of Judah. It is better, therefore, with Toletus and Baronius, to suppose that Hebron is meant; for it was situated in the hill country of Judah.

It is very probable that the Blessed Virgin first went to Jerusalem, since the feast of the Passover was near, and then in the Temple returned thanks to God, and made an offering of herself and her child Jesus to Him.

And entered into the house of Zacharias. This house is thus described by Adrichomedus on the authority of Nicephorus in his description of the Holy Land, “It is one mile distant from Emmaus, near the hills. It was still inhabited in the time of Saligniacus, and travellers were accustomed to salute it reverently. There John was born and circumcised, and concealed in a cave that he might not be slain with the children of Bethlehem by Herod, &c.

they say the Lord is with thee) not as to what had already taken place, but as to what was immediately going to take place.

The Blessed Virgin in the conception of the Son received an extraordinary increase of grace and perfect sanctification; and this, says Suarez, may not be doubted without temerity. Whence Bede (*Hom. de. Visit.*) says, “Who can say or measure what grace then filled the spirit of the Mother of God, when so great a light from heaven shone forth in the mother of His forerunner?” S. Bernard gives a reason for this (*Vol. 1, conclus. 61, art 1, cap. 12*), “In order that God should generate God, no especial arrangement was needed on the part of God, since according to His nature it was fitting that in the way of nature His intellect should produce the Word, in all things equal to Himself; but that a woman should conceive and bring forth God is and was a miracle; for there was a necessity, so to say, that she should be raised to a certain divine equality by means of a certain quasi-infinity of perfections and graces, which equality no creature had ever experienced. Whence, as I believe, no human or angelic intellect has ever been able to attain to that inscrutable abyss of all gifts of the Holy Spirit which descended on the Blessed Virgin in the hour of the Divine conceptions.”

And the angel departed from her. The Blessed Virgin made known to some that Gabriel did not depart immediately, but stayed with her for nine hours, being overcome with astonishment at the Incarnation of the Word in her, and that he adored the Word incarnate; as if rapt in admiration at the incredible modesty and majesty of the Virgin, he were unable to depart. (The records of S. George in Alga in Lusitania mention this tradition.) But though this is a pious tradition it is not to be regarded as certainly true.

Ver. 39.—*And Mary arose in those days.* Not on the same day on which she was saluted by the angel, but after two or three days. What was the reason of her going away?

1. That she might announce the conception of the Word to others. For Christ having become incarnate in her, willed immediately to begin His mission as a Saviour, for which He had been sent by the Father. Whence S. Ambrose says, “She departed, not as disbelieving in the oracle, or as uncertain about the messenger, or doubtful of the example, but as rejoicing in the fulfillment of her wish, conscientious in the performance of her duty, and hastening on account of her joy.”
2. To cleanse John from original sin, and to fill him and his mother Elizabeth with the Holy Spirit, and that so the honour and devotion of all to Christ might be increased.
3. To congratulate her kinswoman on the miraculous conception of John.
4. To give to all future ages a remarkable example of humility and charity which she showed in visiting Elizabeth, though she was now made Mother of God and Mistress of the world.

Mary. In Hebrew *Miriam*, that is, *Mar Yam*, myrrh, or bitterness of the sea; for the Hebrews have a tradition that the sister of Moses was called Miriam, because when she was born the bitter tyranny of Pharaoh in drowning the Hebrew children began. But, by the Divine will, the name was afterwards changed to a different meaning, for after the Red Sea had been crossed and Pharaoh had been drowned, she was called *Mariam* (*Mara Yam*), that is mistress of the sea; for as Moses was the leader of the men, so Miriam was the leader of the women in the passage of the Red Sea. Moreover she was a type, says S. Ambrose, of the Blessed Virgin, who is called Mary, that is the Mistress and Lady of the sea of this world, that she may lead us through it in safety to the promised land, that is heaven. S. Isidore (*vii. Etym. cap. 10*) says, “Mary is by interpretation illuminator or star of the sea; for she brought forth the Light of the world. But in the Syrian language Mary is called Lady, because she brought forth the Lord.” For this reason Mary was full of grace, and a sea of graces; for as all rivers run into the sea, so all graces which angels, patriarchs, apostles, martyrs, confessors, virgins possessed, came together in her, as S. Bonaventura says. S. Bridget also shows in her *Revelations*, i. 9, how delightful the name of Mary is to the angels, and how terrible to demons.

And the angel came in unto her, &c. He glided into the chamber of the Virgin as she was praying in secret for the advent of the Messiah and the salvation of men, either through the window or through the door. For angels, since they are most pure spirits, by means of their subtlety pass through all walls and bodies. Although Andrew, Bishop of Jerusalem, in a sermon on the Annunciation, thinks that the angel secretly opened the door and modestly saluted the Virgin.

Hail, Ave. It is very probable that the angel used the ordinary salutation of the Hebrews, שלום לך, Peace be to thee. Unless the opinion of Serarius is to be preferred, that *ave* is the Hebrew חַיָּה *chave* or *have*, that is, “Live;” so that there is an allusion to the name of Eve, which is in Hebrew חַוָּה *chava*, that is the mother of all living (Gen. iii. 20), so that the meaning will be, Eve was not the mother of life but of death, because by sin she delivered over all her children to death, but thou, O Mary, art truly called Eve, because thou art the mother of life, grace, and glory. Hence in Latin *ave* is *Eva* reversed, because Mary turned the maledictions of Eve into blessings.

Highly favoured. Gratia plena, Vulgate, full of grace. Greek, κεχαριτωμένη, which Beza translates *gratis dilecta, freely loved*; for he thinks that the just have no inherent and intrinsic, but only an extrinsic righteousness, which consists in this, that, although they be sinners, God of his own good will holds and reckons them as just; which is heresy.

But κεχαριτωμένη answers to the Hebrew מְחַנְּנָה, *filled with grace* or *made acceptable*; for χαριτω, signifies *I make acceptable, I render beloved* or

dear, I fill with grace. For God judges nothing to be acceptable except what is truly in itself acceptable; wherefore when He makes any one just and acceptable to Himself, He bestows upon him the gift of justice and inherent grace.

Wherefore *κεχαριτωμένη* is the same as *full of grace*: as it is rendered in our version and the Syrian, &c.; also by S. Ambrose and others of the Fathers. This word therefore signifies—1. That the Blessed Virgin had a gift of grace bestowed upon her by God, and that, in a full measure of excellence beyond other just and holy persons, for this epithet is applied solely to the Blessed Virgin, to the end that she might be made worthy to become in time the Mother of God. 2. That she by means of this gift of grace was wonderfully well-pleasing in the sight of God and of all His angels, and in their eyes altogether lovely and beautiful, so that Christ chose her before all others for His mother.

You will say that Christ was more full of grace than the Blessed Virgin. Others also of the saints are said to have been full of the Holy Spirit, as Stephen.

I answer that they are said to have been full of grace, but in different ways. For, as Maldonatus rightly says, a fountain is full of water, so is a river, so are streams, although there is more water and purer in a fountain than in a river, and in a river than in streams. Christ is full of grace, like a fountain where grace gushes forth and is collected as in a reservoir, and from which it flows forth to all men, as from a head to the members. The mother of Christ is full like a river very near a fountain, which although it has less water than a fountain, yet flows with a full channel. Stephen is full like a stream.

S. Augustine (*Serm xviii de Sanctus*) says, “Mary is filled with grace, and Eve is made clear from guilt; the curse of Eve is changed into the blessing of Mary.” Toletus (*annotat.* 67) shows that the Blessed Virgin was full of all grace, both in body and soul. For she was free from concupiscence (*fomite concupiscentiæ*), so that in her the flesh was subject to the reason and the spirit, as was the case with Adam in Paradise through original righteousness. Wherefore he adds that in her, nature conspired with grace and co-operated with it in every respect. See also what I have said concerning her in the Commentary on the Canticles, especially on those words (c. iv. 7), *Thou art all fair, my love, there is no spot in thee.*

S. Jerome (*Serm. de Assump. B.V.*) says, “It is well said that she was full of grace, because on others grace is bestowed partially (*per partes*), but the fulness of grace in complete treasure was infused into Mary.” And again, “The entire fulness of grace, which is in Christ, came upon Mary, although in a different way.”

Suarez shows that the grace possessed by the Blessed Virgin in the first instant of her conception was greater than the grace which the highest angel possesses, who by one or two acts has perfected all his merits, and therefore she merited more than thousands of men merit through their whole life. Wherefore the Blessed Virgin in this first instant loved and praised God with such earnestness of intention that she exceeded the love, and consequently also the merit, of the highest angel. But in the

and save mankind. For this the Blessed Virgin most ardently desired and prayed for. “*Be it so*, is a mark of desire, not a sign of doubt.” S. Bernard (*Serm. 4 sup. Missus Est*).

There is a question at what precise moment the Son of God became carnate.

1. Andrew of Crete is of opinion that He was incarnate before the angel came to the Blessed Virgin. For his words, *the Lord is with thee*, clearly signify that the King Himself had come.

2. Nicephorus maintains that Christ became incarnate when the angel saluted her and said *Hail, thou art full of grace* (*Lib. 1. c. 8*). S. Jerome (*Ep. 140*) and S. Gregory Thaumaturgus favour this opinion.

3. Others appear to think that He became incarnate when the Angel said *The Lord is with thee*. S. Augustine (*Serm. 2 de Annunc.*) and S. Thomas (3 *p. qu. 30 art. 4*) and others so explain it.

But these opinions cannot be true; because the angel after the *Hail*, &c. adds, *Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb*; therefore she had not yet conceived. Again the Blessed Virgin giving her assent to the angel says, *Be it unto me according to thy word*; therefore it had not yet taken place.

I say then that the Word was incarnate as soon as the Blessed Virgin had given her assent to the angel; for he was sent for this purpose; for it was not fitting that Christ should be conceived without the consent or knowledge of His Virgin Mother; as soon then as she had spoken the words, *Behold the handmaid of the Lord, Be it unto me according to thy word*, the Holy Spirit formed the Body of Christ, and joined It Hypostatically to the Word, or Person of the Son of God; in the same way as when the priest in consecration says, *This is my Body*, by the power of these words the bread is transubstantiated into the Body of Christ. This again is clear from the fact that as soon as the Virgin had given her consent the angel, having, as it were, fulfilled his mission, departed from her. It is confirmed too by the fact that soon after the Blessed Virgin had said, *Be it unto me*, &c., when she saluted Elizabeth, being saluted by her in return she was called the Mother of the Lord, *i.e.* of Christ Who is God. The Virgin, therefore, when she said, *Be it unto me*, &c., was made as it were the spouse of God, and our flesh was made the spouse of the Word.

To those who maintain a contrary opinion it may be replied—1. that Andrew of Crete seems to have been of an opposite opinion, but that he was alone in maintaining it; for the rest contradict him. 2. That Nicephorus by the words *Hail*, &c., understands the whole of the salutation and annunciation made by the angel, at the end of which the Word was made flesh. 3. S. Augustine, S. Thomas, and Damian are to be understood (*when*

seemed to himself to have said but little. He uses, therefore, the indefinite expression, *That Holy Thing*; because whatever it was that the Virgin brought forth, it was without doubt holy and in a singular manner holy, both through the sanctification of the Spirit and the assumption of the Word."

The Son of God by nature, Who would make all the faithful, sons of God by grace.

Ver. 36.—*And, behold, thy cousin Elizabeth.* The angel confirms the miracle of the coming birth of Jesus of the Virgin and the Holy Spirit by the similar miracle of the conception of John by Elizabeth who was barren. At the same time he silently admonishes the Blessed Virgin that she should visit John and Elizabeth, and fill them with the Holy Spirit by saluting them.

For with God nothing shall be impossible (Vulgate, *non omne verbum, no word*, which is a Hebraism), *i.e.* nothing, however difficult or incredible to man; or, as others take it, *no word, i.e.* no promise; which means that God is able to perform all things that He has promised, because He is omnipotent; and He will really perform them because He is faithful. He says *word*, because it is as easy to God to do a thing as it is to us to speak a word, and because He spake a word only and all things were made.

"Inasmuch as," says S. Bernard (*Serm. 4 on Missus Est*), "with God neither does His word fall short of His intention, because He is Truth; nor His deed fall short of His word, because He is Power; nor the manner (in which the deed is done) fall short of the deed, because He is Wisdom." "God," says S. Augustine (*lib. 5 de Civ. c. 10*), "can do all things except those things which to be able to do is a mark not of power, but of weakness; and which if he were able to do He would not be omnipotent; such as to die, to deceive, to err, to sin."

The angel stood, and was silent, eagerly expecting the answer and consent of the Virgin. Whence S. Bernard (*Serm. 4, super Missus Est*) says, that Adam and all the patriarchs and prophets, being anxious concerning the coming of the Messiah and the salvation of men, were waiting for this consent; and he adds "the whole world, prostrate at thy knees, is waiting for this: and rightly, since on thy words depend, the consolation of the miserable, the redemption of the captives, the liberation of the damned, the salvation, in short, of all the sons of Adam. Make answer, O Virgin, speedily, speak the word which earth, which the dwellers below and the dwellers on high are waiting for. The King and Lord of all things Himself desires thine assent, by which His purpose is to save the world."

Ver. 38.—*And Mary said, &c.* Mark the humility, modesty, and resignation of the Virgin, for though saluted by the angel as Mother of God, she calls herself His handmaid, not His mother; handmaid by nature, mother by grace. Pet. Dam. (*Serm. 3 de Nativ. Virg.*). And S. Bernard (*Serm. in Apoc. 12*) says, "A great sign: *deservedly she made mistress of all who declared herself servant of all.*"

Be it unto me (*Fiat*). This word shows that she consented and yielded her assent to the angel with respect to the conception of the Word; also that she wished, desired, and earnestly prayed for the Incarnation of the Messiah, so that He might redeem

second instant of her co-operation and love, by means of the increase of grace which in the first instant she had merited and had in reality received, she doubled the degrees of love and consequently also of merit; and in the third instant, by doubling the same she quadrupled both merit and grace; and so in every instant, by doubling continually the grace she had received, until her death in the seventy-second year of her age, she had increased the degrees of grace and merit to such an extent that she altogether excelled in them all men and angels taken together. Wherefore she by herself alone is more acceptable to God than all the rest; and God loves the Blessed Virgin alone more than the whole Church, that is, more than all men and angels taken together. See also the Revelations of S. Bridget i. 10.

The Lord is with thee. The angel gives the reason why she was full of grace, that is, because the Lord was with her in a singular manner, so that He wrought in her the singular work of the Incarnation of the Word. S. Bernard (*Serm. 3*) says, "What wonder is it that she was full of grace with whom the Lord was? But this rather is to be wondered at, how He who had sent the angel to the Virgin was found by the angel with the Virgin. Was God then swifter than the angel, so that He outstripped him and reached the earth before His swift messenger? Nor is it to be wondered at. For since the king was on His couch, the sweet ointment of the Virgin gave forth its odour, and the smoke of spices went up in the sight of His glory, and she found grace in the eyes of the Lord." And further on he shows that God is in all creatures by power, in rational beings by knowledge, in the good by love, and therefore He is with them by concord of the will, for it is by means of this that they unite themselves to God. Then he adds, "But since He is in this way with all the saints, yet He was in an especial manner with Mary, between whom and Himself there was such a consent that He joined not only her will, but her flesh to Himself, and of His own and the Virgin's substance made one Christ; who although He is not wholly of God nor wholly of the Virgin, yet He is wholly God's and wholly the Virgin's, and not two sons, but the one son of both." Then he shows that the whole Trinity was with the Blessed Virgin. "Not only is the Lord the Son with thee whom thou art clothing with thy flesh, but also the Lord the Spirit by Whom thou art conceiving, and the Lord the Father who begat Him whom thou art conceiving."

S. Bridget (*Revel. iii 29*), conversing with the Blessed Virgin, says, Thou art made like to the Temple of Solomon, in which the true Solomon moves, and He sits who has made peace between God and man. Blessed therefore art thou, O Blessed Virgin, in whom the great God became a little child, the eternal God and invisible Creator became a visible creature." The Blessed Virgin answers, "Why do you compare me with Solomon and his Temple, since I am the mother of Him Who has neither beginning nor end, for the Son of God, Who is my Son, is Priest and King of kings. In short, in my Temple He clothed Himself spiritually with the priestly garments in which He offered sacrifice for the world."

Further S. Thomas (*Quæst. xxx. art. 4*) expounds the words *the Lord is with thee* of the Conception and Incarnation of the Word, which was presently to take place, but which had not already taken place; as I shall show at verse 38.

Blessed art thou among women. The same was said of Jael and Judith, but it is said here of the Blessed Virgin in a far more excellent way, for she excelled Jael and Judith, and all virgins and matrons a thousand times in blessings, gifts, and graces. S. Augustine (*Serm. 18 de Sanctis*) says, "Blessed art thou among women, for thou hast brought forth life both for men and women. The mother of our race brought punishment into the world; the Mother of our Lord brought salvation to the world. Eve was the originator of sin, Mary of merit." Peter Chrysologus (*Serm. 145*) says on these words, "She was truly blessed, for she was greater than the heaven, stronger than the earth, wider than the world; she by herself alone contained God, whom the world contains not; she bore Him Who bears the world; she brought forth Him by Whom she had been begotten, she gives nourishment to the Nourisher of all things living."

Among women. That he might signify that whatever is most excellent in the threefold condition of women is found in the Blessed Virgin. For women are either virgins or widows, or living in matrimony. In Virgins chastity is praised, but not barrenness; in widows liberty of mind is commended, but not solitude, for it is written (Eccles. iv. 10) "Woe to him that is alone, for when he falleth he hath not one to lift him up." In matrimony the education of offspring in what is good is highly esteemed, but not the loss of Virginity. The Blessed Virgin alone among all women possessed virginity without barrenness; liberty of mind without loss of companionship, since she was really espoused to Joseph; and what is a greater thing than these, fruitfulness in offspring without the violation of virgin chastity. And so she appropriated whatever is good in the threefold state of women, and whatever is evil she rejected. Whereupon deservedly the angel proclaims her Blessed above all women.

Ver 29.—*She was troubled.* First, at the unwonted appearance, brightness, and majesty of the angel. Secondly, at his unwonted salutation. S. Jerome (*Epist. 7*) says, "Let a woman imitate Mary, whom Gabriel found alone in her chamber, and therefore, perhaps, she was alarmed at beholding a man whom she was not accustomed to see" Again S. Bernard (*Serm. iii. on Missus Est*) says, "She was troubled, but not alarmed; her being troubled was a mark of modesty; her not being alarmed of courage; while her keeping silence and meditating was a mark of prudence."

What manner of salutation. That is, how noble and august, and exceeding the strength and merits of all men, and therefore even her own. For she, in the greatness of her humility, thought far different, yea, even contrary things of herself. For she thought within herself; I seem to myself to be in need of all grace, how then does the angel call me *fill of grace*, I in my poverty live and associate with poor virgins, how then does the angel proclaim to me that *the Lord is with me*. I esteem myself the least and lowest of all women, how then does the angel say to me, *Blessed art Thou among women.*

S. Ambrose (*on Psalm 119*) understands by the shadow this present and mortal life which the Spirit gave to Christ, for this is, as it were, a shadow of the true life and of eternity.

S. Augustine (*Quæst. V. et N. T. c. 15*) says, *The power of the Highest shall overshadow thee, i.e.* shall attemper itself to thee, as a shadow adjusts itself to a body, for thy human weakness could not contain the fullness of its force and power.

But more simply, the meaning is, It will cover thee as with a veil, *i.e.*, will secretly work a mighty operation in thee; for it will be such and so great a one that no man or angel can penetrate into or comprehend it. For, first, it will form in thee the perfect humanity of Christ; and, secondly, it will unite the same in a certain ineffable manner to the Person of the Word.

Again, *to overshadow* may be taken as answering to the Hebrew word, *ענן* *to cover with a cloud*, and *so to rain upon*, for a cloud pours forth rain, and hence by the shadow and the cloud is signified rain, which is poured forth from the cloud and renders the earth fruitful. An allusion seems to be made to Psalm lxxii. 6, *He shall come down like the rain into a fleece of wool.*

Wherefore that Holy Thing which shall be born of Thee shall be called the Son of God.

Because the Holy Spirit will come upon thee, and cause thee to conceive a son, the Son which shall be born of thee will be holy from His very conception, yea, the Holy of Holies, because He will be called, and through His hypostatic union with the Word will truly be, the natural and Only Begotten Son of God, and will be called so by God, by angels, and by men; for He who is conceived by the Holy Spirit must needs be most Holy. Maldonatus somewhat differently says, "Jesus is called the Son of God, because He will not be begotten as the rest of men are, but by God through the power of the Spirit, and therefore He will be holy, and the Son of God." So (Luke iii. 38) Adam is called the Son of God, because he was created not by man but by God.

He says, *That Holy Thing*, not *Man*, to show that this Son will not be a mere man, but besides being, a man will also be God (*S. Greg. xviii. Moral. c. 27*); and also to declare that Jesus will be holy with a holiness altogether perfect and natural on account of the hypostatic union (Suarez, iii. *p. disp. 18 sect. disp. 18 sect. 1*): so that the meaning is, Jesus, Who will be born of thee, will be Most Holy, yea, Holiness itself.

S. Bernard (*Serm. 4 super Missus Est*) says, "Why does he say merely *that Holy Thing*, and no more? Because there was not any proper or worthy expression that he could use. If he had said that holy flesh, or that holy man, or whatever expression of such a kind he had used, he would have

Shall come upon thee. In order that the conception of Christ, and Christ Himself, might be holy, not only by reason of the hypostatic union with the Word, but also by reason of so divine a conception, for He was conceived not by a man or an angel, but by the Holy Ghost. Wherefore Christ, by virtue of this conception, was not the son of Adam, so as to derive original sin from him, and be born a sinner, as we all are born, but He was most pure and most holy.

Again Christ was conceived by the Holy Ghost, because it was fitting, since He was both God and man, that both should be recognised in the conception. For the conception itself declares that He was Man; for He would not have been conceived unless He had been man; and the manner of the conception shows that He was also God; for to be conceived by a virgin without a husband, shows that He who was conceived was more than man.

Mystically, S. Cyril of Jerusalem (*Catech.* 12) says, the Lord willed to be born of a virgin, to signify that His members would be born according to the Spirit of the Church, which is a virgin.

Lactantius gives another reason, which is that Christ, Who in heaven is ἀμήτωρ, *without a mother*, might be on earth ἀπάτωρ, *without a father*. But the first reason is the chief one, namely, that Christ might be born without original sin.

Proclus (*Hom. de Nativ.*) says, “Mary is both handmaid and mother, both virgin and heaven itself. She is the one bridge by which God comes down to man. She is the wonderful web of that economy, of whom and in whom, in a certain ineffable manner, the admirable fabric of that union was wrought, of which the Holy Spirit was the weaver, the power overshadowing from on high was the spinner; the wool was the old and rough garment of Adam; the woof was the pure flesh of the Virgin; the weaver’s shuttle was the immeasurable grace of her who was with child; the artificer was the Word which passed in through the hearing.”

The power of the Highest, &c. According to Euthymius and Maldonatus, the power of the Highest is the Holy Spirit, Who with power brings the holy works of God to perfection, so that these words are an explanation of what the angel had said, *the Holy Ghost shall come upon thee*. So Christ (cap. xxiv. 49) says to the Apostles, *Tarry in this city (Jerusalem) until ye be endued with power from on high, i.e. with the Holy Spirit*. This it is of which the Church speaks, “Almighty and everlasting God, Who by the co-operation of the Holy Spirit didst prepare the body and soul of the glorious Virgin Mother Mary that she might be worthy to be made a fit habitation for thy Son.”

Shall overshadow thee. S. Gregory (33 *Moral.* c. 2) explains thus, “The Word of God in thee will assume a body, which will be as it were a shadow of Deity, for it will as a shadow veil and conceal it.” And again he says (18 *Moral* 12), “The human body in thee shall receive the incorporeal light of Divinity.” Origen says also that the Body of Christ is called a shadow, because in the Passion it was humiliated and obscured after the manner of a shadow.

Again, the Blessed Virgin was meditating to what end she was so honourably saluted by the angel; for the salutation of the angel had reference to the mystery of the Incarnation which was to be accomplished in her. But since she knew not of this end, she meditated and wondered why she was so honourably saluted by the angel. However, she made no answer, because, as S. Ambrose says, “she did not return the salutation through modesty, nor did she make any answer;” because modesty and astonishment fully occupied her mind, and restrained her tongue.

Listen again to S. Ambrose, “Know the Virgin by her modesty: or she was afraid; as it follows, *and when she heard she was troubled*. It is the habit of virgins to tremble and to be afraid at the approach of a man, and to be bashful when he addresses her. Learn, O virgin, to avoid lightness in talking. Mary feared even the salutation of an angel.”

Ver. 30.—*And the angel said unto her, &c.* The angel removes the fear, and then the rising shame of the Virgin, by the grace, that is, the favour and goodwill which he says she has found in the eyes of God above all women; first, because God chose her from all eternity above all others without merit, and of His free and gratuitous love to be His Mother, of whom he would take flesh: secondly, because as soon as she was conceived and born in time, He so adorned her with every virtue and grace that in His sight she appeared altogether pleasing and worthy to be loved by Him, and exalted above all. Thou hast therefore found favour with God on account of the virtues infused into thee by Him in a most excellent degree. The first is thy most profound humility: the second was thy angelic virginity. S. Basil, in his homily on the human generation of Christ, says, “Virginity is chosen, as being fit and next to sanctity.”

The third virtue was her most ardent charity, by which the Blessed Virgin, being desirous of the redemption of mankind and the Advent of the Messiah, used to pour forth unceasing and fervent prayers for both, and therefore she obtained both, and, further, merited herself to become the mother of the Messiah, not from grace of condignity but of congruity. So S. Bernard (*Hom. 3 super Missus Est*), “Thou hast found what thou wast seeking. Thou hast found what no one before thee was able to find. Thou hast found favour with God. What favour? Peace, between God and man, the destruction of death, the restoration of life.” The Schoolmen everywhere teach that the Blessed Virgin merited to become the Mother of God. See Suarez. And some teach that she merited of congruity not of condignity to become the Mother of God, yet that she did not merit the Incarnation of the Word; for this is antecedent to all merit, and is the cause and origin of it.

Ver. 31.—*Behold, thou shalt conceive.* The angel shows that Mary found favour with God because she is about to conceive and bring forth Jesus,

that is, God and man. He alludes to and also quotes the prophecy, Isa. vii. 14.

Hence then is refuted, first, the Manichæan, who says that Christ did not take real flesh of the Virgin, but only the appearance of flesh; for a son who is conceived in the womb and brought forth is a real son, and not one in appearance only: secondly, Valentinus, who teaches that Christ brought flesh from heaven, and merely passed through the Blessed Virgin, as water passes through a channel; thirdly, Nestorius, who asserts that the Blessed Virgin was not the Mother of God because she was not the Mother of the Divinity; to whom Cyril well replies that she is truly the Mother of God although she did not bring forth His Divinity, but His humanity only, because she brought forth the Man, namely Jesus, Who is truly God: as a father is truly called the father of his son, although he does not beget his soul, but only his flesh, because he begets a man who consists of soul and flesh,

Ver. 32.—*He shall be great, &c. Great* both as God and as man. And He shall be called the Son of the Highest; that is through the hypostatic union. He can and ought of right to be called the Son of God.

Ver. 33.—*And He shall reign over the house of Jacob.* That is, over the Church, as Bede and others say. This kingdom in David was a temporal one, but in Christ a spiritual and eternal one, because He reigns over His saints here by grace, and in heaven He will reign over them in glory. See what I have said on the kingdom of Christ, Matt. xxvii. II.

Ver. 34.—*And Mary said to the angel, &c.* The Virgin had no doubt concerning the truth of the prophesy and promise of the angel, as Calvin blasphemously asserts, but she was anxious as to the manner of its fulfilment, lest the conception of a son should involve a loss of virginity, and a breaking of the vow which she had made concerning it. So S. Ambrose, Augustine, &c.

We may learn here how great was the zeal and love for virginity which the Blessed Virgin had, because, as Nyssen says, “she preferred chastity to the angelic tidings; and preferred being a virgin to being absolutely the Mother of God, as S. Anselm says. For virginity is in itself a virtue most pleasing to God, while maternity is not so absolutely. I say *absolutely*; for in other respects maternity is an incomprehensible dignity bestowed by God (as God Himself is incomprehensible) and an abyss of all graces. For on account of this the Blessed Virgin was endowed with more than angelic virginity, humility, charity, and other virtues, that she might be worthy to become the Mother of God. So S. Augustine, S. Thomas, &c.

Wherefore Bede says, that by a divine gift it was granted to her first among women to make an offering of her virginity to God. And Albertus Magnus (*super Missus Est*, c. 82) says, “The Blessed Virgin is the mother of all who are in virginity, since she was the first to make an offering of her virginity to God, through which offering she became the mother of all virgins.” Wherefore the Blessed Virgin, being most anxious concerning her virginity and the vow she had made with respect to it, makes mention of it as it were by way of objection to the angel. For there was a conflict in her

between the desire of conceiving the Son of God and the fear of losing her virginity: and therefore she obtained both. The sense therefore is: “I surely believe that I shall conceive and bring forth Jesus, the Son of God, but I am doubtful as to the way in which this will be. I know not a man, because I have made a vow of virginity: if God wishes to dispense with this vow, though it be hard, yet I will obey the will of God: but if He seeks to know my desire, I certainly declare that I earnestly desire to preserve the virginity that I have vowed to Him: for He who is a most pure spirit, and therefore the first virgin, has Himself put it into my mind; and it will be honourable to my Son Jesus if He is born of a virgin. For I know what has been foretold by Isaiah, *Behold a virgin shall conceive, and shall bring forth Emmanuel*; and it may be the will of God that I should be that virgin. If it is so, be it so.” Whence on hearing immediately from Gabriel that she would conceive not by a man, but by the Holy Spirit, she immediately breaks forth with great joy of heart, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And it was this word that God wished to hear, so that through the profession of her virginity she might merit to become the Mother of God.

Ver. 35.—*And the Angel answered . . . the Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, &c.* Mark here that the Incarnation is limited only to the Person of the Word, or Son of God: for He alone was incarnate and made man, and not the Father nor the Holy Spirit: and yet the incarnation was the work of the whole Trinity, as its efficient cause and not only of the Son. Yet this work of the Incarnation is appropriated to the Holy Spirit, first, because it was a most holy work; secondly, because the works relating to our redemption, and those which most display God’s goodness are appropriated to the Holy Spirit, because He proceeds forth as the ideal love of the Father and the Son: in the same way wisdom is appropriated to the Son as the Word, and omnipotence to the Father as the first principle and origin. Moreover, the Holy Spirit was the framer of the humanity of Christ, because He fashioned and animated it, but He cannot be called its Father, because He did not contribute or communicate anything to it of His own substance. S. Augustine (*Enchirid.* c. 28).

Further S. Cyril (*Catech.* 12) shows that a virgin by the power of God could conceive and bring forth; and first, in arguing with the Gentiles, he says, “How is it that ye, who say that stones when thrown were changed into men, maintain that a virgin cannot bring forth? How is it that, ye, who fable that a daughter was born out of the head of Jupiter, maintain that it is impossible that one can be born of a virgin’s womb?” And then, arguing with the Jews, he says, “Sara was barren, and she brought forth a child beyond the way of nature at an age when women have lost the power (to do so): either then deny both, or grant both, for the same God was the worker of both.” He further says, that God out of the virgin Adam formed a virgin woman, namely Eve; why could He not then in like manner form a virgin man out of a virgin woman?