

March 25. It was in the first month of Mary's potential motherhood. It was in the very first month in which she moved from the state of girlhood into the cycle of womanhood and fertility. She became maternal and fruitful by the power of the Holy Ghost, and her Child was the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, taking to Himself a human nature from the one little mother of His choice.

It is very important for us to remember all these details with most reverential and respectful attention, if we truly love Mary, the Mother of God. "Blessed is the fruit of thy womb," Elizabeth was to say to her, and we continue to say to her every *Hail Mary* of our life. And this greeting means, "Blessed is the first and only fruit of thy womb," which is Jesus.

It will be well for us once more to stop and pay loving honor in remembrance and in respect to the house in which God became man. It was the beautiful little house in the town of Nazareth, where Mary herself was conceived. It was the cottage of the Immaculate Conception, and of the Incarnation. No other house in the whole history of the world has ever been so honored, so sanctified, by what has occurred within its shelter—the conception of Mary and the Incarnation of God. In the year 1291, at the end of the last Crusade—when the Turks were invading the town of Nazareth for the purpose of destroying this holy little house—it was miraculously taken off its foundation and carried through the air to the country of Dalmatia, hundreds of miles away.

Three years later, in the year 1294, it was again transported miraculously through the air, carried by angels, and gently deposited in the little town of Loreto on the northeast coast of Italy. Ever since that time it has come to be known as the Holy House of Loreto. Every saint worthy of the name, since that time, has honored it, including Saint Ignatius Loyola, Saint Francis Xavier, Saint Philip Neri, etc..

Not many years ago, the holiest little girl of modern times, Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, the Little Flower of Jesus, visited it, and knelt and kissed the floor where the feet of Mary once walked. "Joy filled my heart," she wrote later, "as we went toward Loreto. Our Lady has chosen a truly ideal place for her Holy House...I saw the little chamber of the Annunciation where the Blessed Virgin so often bore Jesus in her arms, after having borne Him there in her virginal womb."

Forty-seven Popes have rendered homage to the Holy House of Loreto in the name of the Catholic Faith, and in tribute to the authenticity of its tradition. It has been given a special feast day all for itself on the tenth of December.



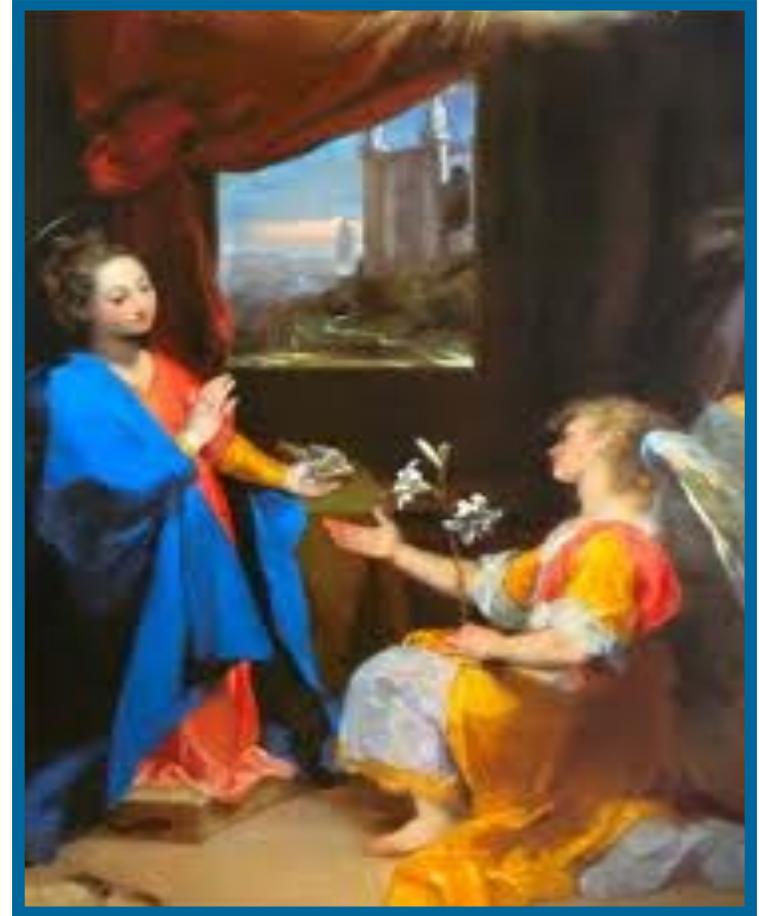
As one enters this holy house, one sees inscribed on the walls, by way of warning and welcome: "Christian pilgrim, you have before your eyes the Holy House of Loreto, venerable throughout the world on account of the divine mysteries accomplished in it and the glorious miracles herein wrought. It was here the most holy Mary, Mother of God, was born, here that she was saluted by the Angel, here that the Eternal Word of God was made flesh."

Angels transporting the house of Nazareth to Loreto, Italy.

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The Annunciation

March 25



The Annunciation by Frederico Barocci

(This painting hangs in one of the side chapels of
The Holy House of Loreto, Italy)

In this depiction of the Annunciation the artist shows the room inside
The Holy House in which the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary.

The Annunciation

When the Blessed Virgin Mary, the spouse of the angelic Joseph, the royal son of David was fourteen years, six months and seventeen days old, there occurred to her, and for her, and through her, the greatest event that ever took place since creation was effected by God and time began. We should describe it with every reverence and awe and majesty that can be felt, as we think of it.

The event to which we now refer to is called "The Annunciation," and it means that it was announced to Mary by God that He wished to become man and wanted to take her for His Mother, provided she would consent. The Annunciation is not God's edict or command or order to the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is rather His petition. It is something He asks of her, and must wait for her consent until it is fulfilled.

The moment when God's request to Mary, will by her consent, be fulfilled, is called the "fullness of time." This means that time and eternity have touched in a single moment of embrace and will never separate again, either for all time or for all eternity.

Let us first consider the great messenger whom God chose out of His three hierarchies, His nine choirs of angels, to bring this message to Mary, who is about to become the Mother of God. The great messenger's name is *Gabriel*, and he is one of the seven angels who stand before the throne of God. Three of these seven angels who stand before the throne of God we know the names of. They are Michael, whose name is a question and means *Who is like to God*; Raphael, whose name means *Medicine, or Healing of God*; and Gabriel, whose name means *Man*, or rather, *Great Man of God, Great Hero of God*, or, as the Latin puts it, *Fortitudo, or Virtus Dei*.

Every angel is a *messenger*, because that is what the word *angel* means. But *Gabriel* is the messenger of all messengers, the mouthpiece, the megaphone of God. So completely is this great angel and pure spirit dedicated to the work of being a messenger, that when a task is assigned to him, he outfits himself for the purpose, and if his message is one from God to man, he outfits himself as a man when he arrives to bring his divine greeting or divine news.

In the Old Testament we encounter this great angel Gabriel especially in the Book of Daniel the prophet, when he comes to tell Daniel how long it will be from his day to the coming of Jesus—and of Jesus' rejection by the Jews. He tells Daniel of the punishment of the Jews which will follow upon their rejection of their King, when the Temple of Jerusalem will be destroyed, never to be rebuilt again unless just before the ultimate consummation of things at the end of the world.

Daniel the prophet speaks of Gabriel as the "Man of God." This does not mean that Gabriel *is* a man, but that he, in the perfect guise of a man, comes to bring his vivid messages straight from the thought of God to the human ears that listen and the human eyes that see.

It was Gabriel, this messenger-of-all-messengers, with the greatest news God ever had to tell. He entered the little side chamber of the home of Mary the Virgin at Nazareth, on the twenty-fifth of March, found her at prayer, and with the appearance of a man, dropped on his knees before her and gave her a message only God and himself knew. Gabriel's words to the little spouse of Joseph of Nazareth were these: "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed are thou among women."

Mary, the Queen of all angels, was troubled at what Gabriel said because of the manner of the greeting. Why should she, who had forfeited the love of all men by taking a virginal spouse in her husband, Joseph, now find an angel in the form of a most compellingly radiant man, kneeling in the room before her and offering her praise?

And then Gabriel said to her, "Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found grace 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 Jacob forever. And of His kingdom there shall be no end."

And Mary, still eyeing him, said, "How shall this be done, because I know not man?" And Gabriel answered and said to her, "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 Mary said to Gabriel, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord: be it done to me according to thy word."

Mary was in the protection, as we see, of two great persons: Joseph, who for her sake became as it were an angel, and Gabriel, who for her sake became as it were a man.

The fruit of the Annunciation was the Incarnation of the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, the Eternal Son of the Father, Who became in time the Child of Mary the Virgin. In Him there is one Person and two natures, the nature of God and the nature of man.

The Incarnation took place in the country of Palestine, in the province of Galilee, in the town of Nazareth, in the womb of Mary, on the twenty-fifth of March is a day well to remember. It was on the twenty-fifth of March, at three o'clock in the afternoon, that Christ would die on Calvary. The day was a Friday. It was on the twenty-fifth of March, at three o'clock in the afternoon, that Adam, the first man, was created, in the first week of creation. The day was a Friday.

It was on the twenty-fifth of March, we repeat, at three o'clock in the afternoon, that Mary the virgin said, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord: be it done to me according to thy word"—at which moment, "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." The time was three o'clock. The day was a Friday.

No one can ever forget these days, or dates, or hours, or events, who truly loves God in eternity, the Word made flesh in time, and Mary, the Mother of God.

The Angel Gabriel's greetings to the Blessed Virgin Mary were three, and Our Lady's replies were, of course, three. Her first reply was a gesture indicating perplexity, "What manner of greeting is this?" Her second reply was a question, "How shall this be done, since I know not man?" And her third reply was a consent, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord: be it done to me according to thy word."

Gabriel also informed Mary that, by a special providence of God, her cousin Elizabeth, a woman both sterile and too old to bear a child, was already six months with one, because no word was impossible with God.

Our Lady was fourteen years, six months and seventeen days old when the Incarnation took place. It was, as we have said, three o'clock on Friday afternoon, on