



# The Annunciation of the Lord

Monday 8th April 2024 (Normally 25th March)



The Feast of the Annunciation celebrates the time when the Blessed Virgin Mary learns that God is inviting her to become the mother of his son: Jesus.

This is amazing! This is exciting!

This feast is normally held on the 25th of March – nine months before Christmas day.

(The reason it is different this year is because it was moved because it was more important to focus on Holy Week this year). So, the Church is inviting us to start anticipating the coming of Jesus into our world in flesh and blood... it is inviting us to start getting excited for Christmas!

The readings for this feast remind us of the coming of Jesus, "...the virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel, which means "God is with us!" (Isaiah 7:14), but that is not all... key themes in the scripture readings for today are about the Son of God taking a human body, to come and do the will of the Father. And, in the Gospel of the Annunciation to Mary, the young virgin, full of grace (or in close relationship with God), says her "Yes" to God too. This day is about heaven and earth moving to fulfil the will of God... the good will of God, that he will be so close to his people that he will live among us as one of us.

- **Christmas is Coming**
- **Here I am, Lord; I come to do your will. (Response to the Psalm)**
- **God's Invitation – Call to the young woman, Mary.**
- **Mary's response**
- **Messenger Angels**



# Christmas is Coming

Although Advent is the liturgical season for thinking about how we are waiting for the coming of the Lord, we can already not hold our joyful anticipation as we hear this great news as-though it were new. We should keep renewing our faith, our waiting for the Lord – just as we pray, “Thy Kingdom Come” every time we pray the Lord’s prayer; the “Our Father.” To renew our faith and our anticipation of our Lord’s always new coming into our lives and our world helps us to live in joy, in hope, and in loving community.

The readings of the day also remind us why it is good that Jesus is coming... he is coming to save us. How he will save us is indicated a little in the second reading; Hebrews 10:4-10. The way he saves us is by becoming one of us, a human being, and becoming obedient to the will of God. Now, obedience to the will of God in the case of Jesus, was an exceedingly demanding thing in the end... but we can take some time to think of some of the other wonderful things Jesus did which were doing the will of God. Jesus made the wedding feast extra special by changing water into wine, to save the new married couple and their family being embarrassed. He forgave people their sins. He healed them in mind and in body. He taught them about God and how to pray and how to have faith. All these great gifts of Jesus were promised for generations and became real in the gift of Jesus at Christmas.

- **What did Jesus do, that was the will of God, that particularly touches your heart?**
- **Can you think of the last time you did what you believed was the will of God?**
- **How did that make you feel?**
  
- **Have you ever been a “gift of God” in somebody else’s life?**
- **Who has been a “gift of God” for you in your life?**
- **Can you see a link between being a “gift of God” and God’s will in the world?**

# Here I am, Lord; I come to do your will. (Response to the Psalm)

The words of this psalm are beautifully telling us how Jesus, and so how we – as followers of Jesus – should do the will of God. Let us pray this psalm together.

Here I am, Lord; I come to do your will.  
Sacrifice or oblation you wished not,  
but ears open to obedience you gave me.  
Holocausts or sin-offerings you sought not;  
then said I, “Behold I come.”

## **Here I am, Lord; I come to do your will**

“In the written scroll it is prescribed for me,  
To do your will, O my God, is my delight,  
and your law is within my heart!”

## **Here I am, Lord; I come to do your will**

I announced your justice in the vast assembly;  
I did not restrain my lips, as you, O LORD, know.

## **Here I am, Lord; I come to do your will**

Your justice I kept not hid within my heart;  
your faithfulness and your salvation I have spoken of;  
I have made no secret of your kindness and your truth  
in the vast assembly.

## **Here I am, Lord; I come to do your will**

*(Excerpts from Psalm 40, NAB translation)*

- **What does it feel like when you pray, “Here I am, Lord; I come to do your will” in response to the verses of this psalm?**
- **Can you think of how you can respond even better to the call of God to do His will in your life?**

# God's Invitation – Call to the young woman, Mary

This gospel story of the annunciation – the announcing of the message of God by the angel to Mary – is announcing that Christmas will come, Our Lord will come.

Mary was a young woman when the Angel came to give her this message, and Mary was so full of Joy, as we remember from our catechesis and the theme of World Youth Day, that she went a long way to share the news with her older cousin Elizabeth. Perhaps Mary was also going to the person who would not only share her joy, but also give her some advice? Is it not strange that Mary should go to a woman who herself has no experience in being a mother yet? How true do you think it is, that Elizabeth might have had some wisdom that came not from experience but from observation and prayerful wisdom?

One of the special things about Mary, was that she was “full of grace,” and that means, she was full of God and friendship with God. She was like Eve was in the garden of Eden before the fall from grace... so Mary walked with God and was not afraid of God. So, when God's messenger, the Angel came to her, her heart was open to the mystery of God who would come into her life in a unique way and do wonderful things with her. Have you ever imagined what it would be like to walk in the garden of Eden, with God, and not be afraid or ashamed? The thing is, because Jesus has restored our innocence by his obedience and his ultimate sacrifice on the cross, because we are baptised into him, we too will be able to walk with God once more, without fear or shame.

- **Have you ever thought of the knowledge that comes not from books or experience, but from observation and prayer?**
- **Would you think this is a worthwhile knowledge?**
- **If you think it is a valuable kind of knowledge, what kind of knowledge would you say it was?**
  
- **What would you say to God if you walked with him in the Garden of Eden?**
- **How open is your heart to hearing the invitation of God to follow his good will for you?**





# Mary's response

When Mary heard the invitation of God through the Angel, she said: "How can this be?" As-if to say, "how can we make this happen?" Mary was not only open to God's invitation, but immediately asking the details of what she needed to do. She did not say, "how long do I have to think about this?"

Then, after she gets all the details and understands, she says, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Her understanding is followed by her immediate yes.

How we respond to God's invitation helps us to understand what is really going on in our relationship with God. If we have a regular, open, and trusting relationship with God, we will respond in one way. If we have a distant or fearful relationship with God, we will respond in a totally different way. Most of us will be somewhere in-between, and that is just because we are all at various stages of a journey. We need to be patient with ourselves because we cannot be saints overnight, but at the same time, we need to consciously chose to try to grow in our friendship with God. Our growing in holiness is the work of the Holy Spirit, we just need to do our part in being open to God as best we can. Like, preparing the ground for seeds to be planted. The more we talk to God, the more we can trust him, and that will take fear out of our lives and make us happier. We will be more open to God and more able to understand his will in our lives. We will be living with God every day, and that will be a little taste of heaven.

- **Can you think of times in your life when you have seen a little bit of heaven around you? Describe it.**
- **What kind of relationship with God are you seeking?**
- **Where in your life is God inviting you to say "yes" but you have not been able to?**

# Messenger Angels



Angels for Christians are messengers of God. They carry God's word or represent God in a particular way. The angel Gabriel, in the case of the gospel of the Annunciation, carried the message of God to Mary, that he wanted her to be the mother of his son, Jesus.

Just as the Risen Lord appeared in different ways after his resurrection, we know this because there were times when his disciples did not recognise him... God's angels can appear in different guises too, when they are sent into our world to speak to us.

It might be that God is sending an angel into your life. If this is the case, then it is very important that you prepare your heart for this, so that you can be open to the message when it comes. We need to keep our mind, our hearts, our spiritual eyes, open and actively seeking out God's angel messengers.

- **Do you want to meet the messenger angel that God is sending you?**
- **How are you preparing your mind, heart, and spiritual eyes to see this messenger?**
- **If you find it difficult to open your mind, heart, and spiritual eyes, ask God for his Holy Spirit to help you.**

## Concluding Prayer

In this year of preparation for the Jubilee of 2025, the church is inviting us to pay particular attention to the "Our Father" prayer Jesus taught us. Let us pray this prayer now, especially thinking of the part of "Thy will be done, Thy Kingdom come," so that we can prepare our minds, hearts, and spiritual eyes, to be better able to see God's will and God's kingdom around us.