

# The Annunciation of Our Lord to the Blessed Virgin Mary

## March 25<sup>th</sup> 2020

### *The Collect for today*

We beseech you, O Lord,  
Pour your grace into our hearts,  
That as we have known the incarnation  
Of your Son, Jesus Christ  
By the message of an angel,  
So by his cross and passion  
May we be brought to the glory of his resurrection;  
Through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
Who is alive and reigns with you,  
In the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
One God, now and forever. Amen

### Luke 1: 26-38

<sup>26</sup> In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup> And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.'<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>29</sup> But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup> The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. <sup>31</sup> And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. <sup>33</sup> He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' <sup>34</sup> Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?'<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>35</sup> The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born<sup>[c]</sup> will be holy; he will be called Son of God. <sup>36</sup> And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. <sup>37</sup> For nothing will be impossible with God.' <sup>38</sup> Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her.

## *Reflection*

We still sometimes talk about '*red-letter days*' – so called because in early copies of the Book of Common Prayer, the major festivals were printed in red in the Kalendar – and now you know I am a mine of useless information!

Joking aside, today is one of those red-letter days – the Feast of the Annunciation - an important marker in the liturgical year, exactly nine months before Christmas Day. The Annunciation has several names: *Lady Day*, *Feast of the Incarnation* and *Christ's Conception* among them. It has been celebrated by Christians since the 300s and perhaps earlier. All such festivals allow us to focus on important markers on the Lord's journey. This festival allows us to focus on the wonder of God's binding to our humanity in the face of Jesus Christ through the intimacy of human birth, born of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In this time of

huge lock-down worry when the Covid-19 virus bears the shadow of death as part of its effect on humanity and reminds us of our mortality, the Annunciation reminds us how much God desires us to know the divine sharing of our human journey from beginning to end as Jesus Christ shares exactly the same journey from birth to death.

In the Lorenzkirche, Nuremberg, one of the two great medieval church of that city, is an extraordinary carved tableaux of the Annunciation – the Angelic Salutation - which has hung in the chancel for over 500 years. It is by one of the finest medieval Bavarian carvers, Steit Voss. Both Gabriel and Mary are life-sized, and Mary has lovely rosy cheeks. Around them is a carved circle of golden roses containing little depictions of some of the ‘mysteries’ of the rosary (a Dominican devotion) together with a string of huge wooden beads hanging down on either side. Little angels playing musical instruments are depicted, some suspended from wires so they look as if they are floating in the air. At the top God is depicted as Father, with rays of glory descending towards the angel and Mary. Mary has a dove representing the Holy Spirit resting on her head.

Many wonder at how such a work could have survived, particularly as Nuremberg became a protestant city at the Reformation, but Luther, when asked about such images in churches, decided that it was fine for them to remain as long as they weren’t used superstitiously. I think the money from the donor families might have had something to do with it! Very often during its history the Angelic Salutation has criticised and even covered, but it has survived 502 years thus far! I wanted to tell you about it because it seems to me to indicate one of the great messages we may take from this Feast of the Annunciation.

Luke, in his radiant birth narratives at the start of his Gospel describes this call to Mary with great care. He uses a different style of writing to much of the rest of the Gospel to draw us back to the interactions between God and humanity recorded in the Old Testament. In doing so Luke also wants us to understand that the child to be born will be the complete fulfilment of the whole passage of the Scriptures of the Old Testament. This is none other than the keeping of the divine promise of salvation. The word ‘salvation’ has a rather loaded history in Christian terms. It might best be described in this day and age as the recognition and opportunity to become the people God calls us to be. Jesus Christ will be the one who teaches us how to do this, not just through teaching, but through self-giving love on the cross.

Steit Voss’s Angelic Salutation reminds us that through faith in Jesus Christ, our human nature is bound to God’s divine nature. God wants us to know that we are always welcome to share in his love, no matter what. All that is required is the desire to journey faithfully, always open to God’s presence within our lives. Mary did just that. She opened herself to God’s love with the words, ‘Let it be with me according to your word.’ Let us, like her, allow God to pour into our hearts the knowledge of his love for us.

This is the most wonderful journey we can ever made, and its destination our heavenly union within God’s infinite love and compassion.

## *Post Communion Prayer*

God most high,  
Whose handmaid bore the Word made flesh;  
We thank you that in the sacrament of our redemption  
You visit us with your Holy Spirit  
And overshadow us by your power;  
Strengthen us to walk with Mary  
The joyful path of obedience  
And so bring forth the fruits of holiness;  
Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen

