

Sermon for the Feast of the Annunciation

'The angel Gabriel was sent from God.'

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[These are frightful times, and indeed, many are frightened. We who live in this modern age thought we had moved past what was once a somewhat regular occurrence: a plague. It is new to us; something never seen in recent memory; and so we are afraid. Let us, therefore, take this day to contemplate that young maid, Holy Mary, who did indeed see something truly unseen, an angel of God, and yet, having heard his words, feared not, and was therefore blessed to bear Him who would destroy the fear of death and all evil.]

The Annunciation unto the blessed virgin of the conception of Christ is not a day commonly observed in our churches. It seems to belong in the season of Advent or Christmas, yet it is celebrated on the 25th of March, always in the middle of Lent, as we watch our Lord as He takes the sin of all mankind, and bears it unto *his holy hill*, that upon that mount, all creation might be crucified in Him, that in His resurrection, all that God made in the beginning might be made new.

That Christ's conception by the Word of God is celebrated on the 25th of March is for a simple reason, it is exactly nine months before the Feast of the Nativity in December. In fact, the feast of Christmas is observed on the 25th of December because it is nine months after the day of Our Lord's conception.

One may ask, why is it that we believe that Christ was conceived on the 25th of March? How can one know such a thing?

It is because the early Church recalled the day of Christ's death, the day of His descent into hell, and it was this day in the month of March. It was a commonly believed tradition of the Jews that a great prophet was conceived on the very day

that he died. Therefore, if He died on this day, He was also conceived on this day.

Now we see what seems to be a kind of backward reasoning, or perhaps a reverse engineering. Because Christ died on this day, He was conceived on this day; and because He was conceived on this day, He shall be born unto us nine months hence.

Things are turned around. Good Friday does not follow Christmas and the Annunciation, but rather the Annunciation and Christmas follow from Good Friday, and rightly so, for, *for this purpose Christ came into the world, 'that He might be offered as a ransom for many.'* It is in view of the final Sacrifice, that the Paschal victim is offered into this dying world.

The angel Gabriel comes to the ever-blessed virgin Mary, who is to us the Mother of God. He announces to her that *she shall conceive and bear a son*. Indeed, she shall bear not just a son, but a sacrifice. *'A spear shall pierce her heart'*, for she will see the blood of her son poured out, and even as Christmas follows Good Friday, Life after Death, a mother in mourning shall bury her son, that her son might rise again, and all the world with Him.

Now, it would seem, that, far from being out of place, the Annunciation and Conception of Our Lord are right at home in the Season of Lent, for His conception finds its meaning in His death.

'You shall conceive and bear a son.' All of her ancient race, when confronted with a divine revelation of the Lord either doubted, as did Sarah, or fled in fear, as did Jonah, or sought an escape from the consequences, as did Moses. But Mary, young, and meek, neither doubts nor flees; nor seeks she any release. Her response is simple. It is that response which God has desired from mankind for all eternity. *'Let it be to me according to your word.'*

There is a God within whom all things *live and move and have their being*. And this God shall be pierced upon a tree; Him within which all the world is hidden, having hidden all things within His flesh.

Yet on this day, we see Him in which all things are hidden, hidden within this young girl, no more than a teenager. On this day, she alone is the Church, for in her alone does the Word of God dwell bodily.

Soon we will see this young girl, now become a grown woman, weep tears of

sorrow; yet today, let us hear that our Lord has entered into our flesh in the Holy Virgin, and weep tears of joy, for the Lord has not forgotten us, but has *sent his only begotten son*.

Therefore, sing as the saints of old that song of wretched men now redeemed:

'You have multiplied, O Lord my God, your wondrous deeds and thoughts toward us. O Lord, you will not restrain your mercy from me.'

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts: Psalm 40:5-11; Isaiah 7:10-14, Hebrews 10:4-10; Luke 1:26-38.