

The Annunciation of Our Lord, A✝D 2009

Luke 1:26-38 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² 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 father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵ And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy- the Son of God. ³⁶ And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸ And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

In the Name of the Father and of the ✝ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1 "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" Mary asked the angel. "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy- the Son of God." What could be more miraculous? The Messiah, the long-awaited Deliverer of the world she would carry in her womb for nine months. Sure, there would be explaining to do to Joseph, her betrothed. There would be nine long months of sideways glances from townspeople as her belly grew and half-whispered comments speculating who the father might be. Yet she replied, "I am a servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." This Child was God-in-human-flesh, Immanuel. And she was the Virgin of whom Isaiah prophesied, who would bear Immanuel. Pregnancy is never easy, and hers would be fraught with stigmatization and scorn. But this much was certain: her hope would be fulfilled.

2 A couple watching their growing baby through the fuzzy black and white of an ultrasound monitor is equally hopeful, but less certain. They have dreams of holding their newborn baby for the first time, of listening to her tiny cries, or holding her miniature fingers. They bring her—yet unborn—to the Divine Service, her Lord comes to meet her, and they, along with the whole Church, commend her in prayer to her Lord. But what comfort do you give this couple when an ultrasound fails to show a heart beat, when bleeding indicates something has gone wrong.

When their hopes seem dashed and their baby is miscarried, stillborn, or dies shortly after birth before there's time or opportunity for Holy Baptism? For the last three weeks, we have considered the Lord's gift of Holy Baptism, and you have learned that it is not a gift you may despise. As certainly as the Lord says so, Baptism saves.

3 This much is certain: your hope will be fulfilled. All pregnancies have an element of uncertainty, nervousness, and anxiousness. Except one. The Lord who joined Himself to human flesh in the womb of the Blessed Virgin, who was like you in every way, who was like your children—born and unborn—in every way, who was a zygote, then a blastocyst, then an embryo, then a fetus, was not miscarried. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit not to die in the womb but on the cross. From the moment of conception, His death was certain, but He would not die through chance, or accident, or tragedy. He would lay His life down for sinful humanity. Because of His death, your hope will be fulfilled.

4 The Lord was not miscarried in the womb of the Virgin nor left stillborn in the womb of the grave. No, beloved, He who died for your sins rose victorious over death, every kind of death. He didn't just defeat the peaceful death that everyone wants to have, the one that comes at the end of a long life, that takes us painlessly in our sleep. No, He defeated all death: the kind that creeps over you for eighty years, the kind that stings suddenly and unexpectedly, the kind that takes the most vulnerable whose lungs have yet to take their first breaths. He is the firstborn from the dead. And all who have hope in Him will follow from the womb of the grave after Him.

5 Your hope will be fulfilled. The dead in Christ will rise. The Church has no miscarriages. All her children will live eternally. You who have been born into the Church through the rebirth of Holy Baptism, who became her children through the womb of the font, will be raised with all the dead in Christ to dwell eternally with the Crucified Lord, the Firstborn from the dead. You will be rejoined with those who now rest from their labors and with those who were spared earthly labors and gathered to the Lord straight from the womb.

6 Your hope will be fulfilled. She who gave birth to you continues to nurse you, to feed you with the precious milk of the forgiveness of sins from the Lord's Altar. The Church, your Mother, carried you to your Lord the same way you carried your children—born and unborn—to the Lord: through the Divine Service and through prayer. The dead in Christ will be raised to dwell in His loving presence eternally. Your hope will be fulfilled.

In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria
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