

# The Annunciation: The Message of an Angel

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. 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. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"

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 will be holy; he will be called Son of God. 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. For nothing will be impossible with God.”

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.

Luke 1:26–38

God (or the Angel Gabriel?) had my complete attention. The tears running down my face were making the gentleman sitting next to me on the plane a bit uncomfortable—I could tell by his shifting in his seat. An eager twenty-one-year-old traveling home, I was focusing in prayer and reflection on the few months I had just spent in Peru, working as a volunteer with God’s people there. I knew that during my short stay I had not done much for Peru; I had painted a few adobe houses pastel colors, which would be sure to wear off before long. Nevertheless, I had the impression that Peru had done quite a number on me; that this experience would never wear off. It would possibly even change the course of my life! I was, to say the least, greatly troubled!

Through my tears, I recalled Mr. and Mrs. Paredes and the medical clinic they had set up just outside of Cartavio, in the Santa Rosa section, a place made up of former pig sties that many disenfranchised people now called home. They always kept up their hope amid so many signs of poverty and despair. The people suffered together, but they also knew how to celebrate together. They had inspired me to do more with my faltering

Spanish than I'd ever thought possible. Was it true that I was really communicating with people, talking about God with them, and even laughing at their jokes in a language that contained within itself an entirely different view of the world than the one I'd grown up with? "How could this be?" I thought. A new world had been opened up.

How could it be that I was stirred on the plane to sense an invitation in all this, one that scared me a bit? The "Angel" told me not to be afraid. Could God be asking me to drop all my personal plans of becoming a professor of literature after ordination and working at one of the colleges sponsored by my religious community? Could the Lord be inviting me to follow up on this intense interest I'd experienced in the Latino people? Was I meant to work with Hispanics in ministry, either in Peru or in my own country? How could all this be?

The answer was coming to me now. It could be by the power of the Holy Spirit, whose presence I had felt deeply during my visit as a volunteer. My interest in the people was a pastoral one. I was being called to minister, somehow, among Spanish-speaking people. This was clear to me. And it was also clear to me that this invitation was not due to my simple musings. It was an invitation from God, even "made known by the message of an angel," and by God's good grace it would be realized. "Nothing will be impossible with God."

The revelation given to me in that moment was overwhelming. I felt much as I had when I concluded in prayer that I would enter the seminary, because it

seemed to be what God wanted of me. This, now, was a call within a call, to work with Latinos as a priest. I had vowed to be obedient to God, and here God's will was being made very clear to me. I said 'yes' and placed myself in God's hands as the plane droned homeward. In the ensuing years, I have come to know some of the beauty and the nuance of the Hispanic cultures, and have greatly enjoyed pastoral ministry with Latinos.

This may or may not strike you as an annunciation story. I am certain that it is. God has a way of announcing to us, through the "Angels," just what it is that God wills for us to do with our lives. When it happens, we know it. And though we are not full of grace or immaculately conceived, and though we do not enjoy the same level of prayerful communication with God as Mary did, we can follow her example in our initial fright, and then in our questioning for clarification, and finally in our saying, "Yes, I am the servant of the Lord. May it be done according to your word!"

Do you ever think about and pray over your annunciation stories? If you are married, think of how the Angel Gabriel made it clear to you that "this is the one to marry!" There is surely an annunciation story there. Who was your "Angel Gabriel"? What signs of God's will did you pick up on? Did you go through a process of prayer, doubt, and sleepless nights? With whom did you consult before you made your decision? Did you sense God's presence in that decision?

Or take your profession—by profession I mean whatever it is that occupies your attention, time, and

energy as work (schoolwork, maintenance tasks, and housework all count!): how did you come to know that this was for you, that you had the gifts to be a nurse or a construction worker or a police officer, banker, lawyer, or teacher?

God is communicating with us right now, quite regularly, letting us know what God's will is for us. It happened this way for Mary of Nazareth, and she became the Mother of God according to God's word. It happens this way for us.

All of us want to live according to God's word as well. There is an annunciation story that is the beginning of our vocation stories. As we contemplate the annunciation that Our Lady received and accepted, we pray the first Joyful mystery of the Rosary. As we repeat the words of the Hail Mary, perhaps we can reflect on our own annunciation stories, how we came to do God's will as revealed to us by the message of an angel. For those who still have not received such revelation of what God wants of them, pray to be attentive to the message of God's angels.

There is depth to be added to our prayer relationship with the Lord here. Of course, hindsight is very helpful to us as we attempt to discern our various annunciation moments while praying the Rosary. Hopefully contemplating the mystery of God's annunciation to Mary will help us to recognize the annunciations of the same God

in our own lives. May our response to such moments be as courageous and self-giving as that of Mary herself.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

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*Recall an annunciation you received. Did it speak to you regarding whom to marry or what profession to undertake? Something else?*

*Who were the various "Angels Gabriel" that were instruments of God's annunciation to you?*