

## Annunciation '18

The book of Genesis tells us that man was made in the image of God. This means that he was **unique** in all of creation. Mankind had something no other created being had: **Free Will**...the ability to choose. However, the first humans, Adam and Eve took this gift from God and used it to disobey Him. Eve, tempted by the devil (in the guise of a serpent), chose to break God's command not to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden, -- as did Adam. And by doing so, they committed the very first sin. The consequence of which, was the introduction of death into creation.

As St. Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans:

“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world and by sin death, so death passed to all men.”

This is what we refer to as “The Fall.” The time when humanity severed its communion with God (who is the source of life), and was removed from paradise--relegated to a life of pain, suffering and mortality.

But, despite our disobedience, God did not abandon us. St. Basil says in the Anaphora of his Divine Liturgy:

“Thou didst not turn thyself away forever from thy creature whom thou hast made, O good One, neither didst thou forget the work of thy hands; but thou didst visit him in diverse manners through thy tender mercies.”

God took compassion on his creation, and visited mankind, by speaking to him by the mouths of the prophets. Through them, He foretold to us His plan for our redemption. In the book of Isaiah chapter 7, the prophet promised that “the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”

This weekend, we are celebrating the fulfillment of that promise. Today, we remember how the Archangel Gabriel was sent by God to the Virgin Mary to announce to her the good news that she had been chosen to be the one to conceive, and give birth to **Immanuel**, explaining to her that: “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.”

Now, this is not meant to imply that Mary did **not** have a say in the matter. Certainly, God desired to have Mary as His mother, but, God is pure love **and** as St. Paul says: “Love does not insist on it’s own way.” So, Mary, like our foremother Eve, had a choice. **She could have said “NO”**. But, out of her humility, and desire to be obedient to God, Mary answered, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord, Let it be unto me according to thy Word.”

By giving her consent, a miracle happened. The Word of God, the 2<sup>nd</sup> person of the Holy Trinity, became incarnate in the womb of the Virgin. Therefore, the hymns of the Church describe her as the heavenly ladder by which God came down.

Mary, who had spent most of her life in the Jewish Temple, became herself a Temple of the living God. How the uncontainable God was contained within her womb is a mystery.

Mary's conceiving without a man, and her remaining a virgin after birth seems impossible.... But as the church teaches:

“Where God wills, He overcometh the order of nature.”

Indeed, she did give birth to a son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who lived a life without sin, (the way that we were supposed to live from the very beginning). He offered himself as a sacrifice on the cross, to die for our sins... and to rise so that we would be raised with him and be redeemed from the Fall.

Whereas, the dialogue between the fallen angel and Eve in the garden had disastrous consequences for us, the dialogue between the angel Gabriel and Mary had nothing but positive results for all mankind. Their dialogue did **not** lead to death, but rather to the birth of the one who would destroy it. Thus, Mary becomes the “New Eve” and Jesus “The New Adam.”

Mary's simple “Yes” was the “beginning of our salvation.” (As we sing in the Troparion of the feast)..”

However, our participation in that salvation is still very much dependent upon our own individual free will. As with Eve and Mary, we too are given a choice. All of us, as free beings, are able to determine our own destiny.

We know, that through his incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension, Christ has made it possible for us to be with God in paradise once again. Through His saving work, God has issued us all an invitation to the Kingdom. But it is up to us to accept that invitation by doing His Will.

In order to join Him in the Kingdom, we must keep His commandments, and faithfully follow the teachings of Christ.

Again, God will not force us to do this.

He will not force us to pray, he will not force us to study Scriptures, He will not make us repent and confess our sins so that we can partake of his body and blood. It is up to us to choose to do this.

Now this is not to say that our will and our efforts alone are enough for salvation, **God's grace is needed**. But that's what the church and the sacraments are for! It is through them that we receive His Grace, and the means to accomplish the things necessary for our salvation.

—And yet, how often do we neglect them? How often do we miss church services? How often do we turn away from God and insist on OUR OWN WAY?--acting more like the disobedient Eve rather than the faithful Virgin Mary? Probably more often than we care to admit.

The choice is ours brothers and sisters. God is awaiting our answer to His invitation. Will we be faithful servants and

handmaidens of the Lord? I pray that our answer is the same as Mary's:

**May God's will be done by each of us!**

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,  
One God, Amen.