

In nomine Jesu

ON ACCOUNT OF JESUS, MARY IS MOST BLESSED OF WOMEN

Our sermon for this Feast of the Annunciation of Our Lord to the Blessed Virgin Mary on this sixth Wednesday of Lent is taken from our inspired readings, with the day's emphasis heard in the following verse:

And having come in to her, he said, "Rejoice, O one having been bestowed grace, the Lord (is) with you!"¹

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

Today, we are celebrating a minor Feast with the color blue. It is the color which is traditionally associated with the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Western Church. Our weekday tradition for this Feast is celebrated with reverence. That is because we actually know, from the scriptural record that, on account of Jesus, Mary is the most blessed of women. That means that the Annunciation is not really about Mary. Rather, the Feast is about Mary's Child Who was conceived of the Holy Spirit through her hearing of the Word of God.

Now, to some, it may seem a bit unusual to interrupt the purple of Lent with the blue of Mary. It is such the case that, if you have Spanish ancestry, you may have churchly reason to consider this bright color is out of place in Lent, a season of repentance. Your Spanish forbearers would have celebrated the Annunciation on December 19. They did so to avoid the blue having any opportunity to blend into the purple of Lent. That is one solution...

Even so, today truly begins a nine month countdown to the Feast of

¹ Luke 1:28.

the Nativity. It is possible that the Church Fathers set the Feast of the Annunciation of our Lord to help fix the date of Christmas. Yet, from the first mention of the Annunciation as a Feast, in the early AD 530s, it appears that dating of Christmas came first, by about two centuries. If so, it was certainly easy to count the months backward to arrive at March 25 in order to celebrate the Divine Conception of our Lord.

That being said, some 300 years before the first mention of today's feast, Church leaders had concluded that Jesus had died on March 25. We surely can appreciate their attempt to hold to an ancient notion held by the Jewish forerunners of the Christian confession of the Faith. That is, they believed that the prophets of Israel died on the same dates as their births or conceptions. Therefore, they reasoned that if Jesus died on March 25, He must have been conceived on March 25. Such reasoning held well into the time of St. Augustine (AD 354-430).

We are so far removed in history from those dates that we at times believe the way we celebrate events in the Church is the way they have *always been*. So, keeping all these historical realities in mind: blue in Lent; the Annunciation of our Lord to Mary; the set dating of this Feast in the early AD 500s; a tradition of tying Jesus' death date to His conception date; let us return to our theme verse:

And having come in to her, he said, "Rejoice, O one having been bestowed grace, the Lord (is) with you!"²

As you recall, during this year's Lenten season, we have been recalling Jesus' Way of the Cross. The angel pronounced God's having

² Luke 1:28.

bestowed His grace on a young maiden. That means that the Word revealed to a sinful human female that the eternal Son of God would be with us. In that divine announcement, God began the fulfillment of the prophecy He had given through Isaiah, which you will recall was:

*Therefore, He will give, Adonai, Himself (a) sign: "Behold! The Virgin (is) pregnant and bearing (a) Son, and she will call His name "Emmanuel.""*³

Emmanuel, "GodWithUs" was accomplishing that as the Word went into Mary's ears. She heard and believed. Then, she uttered Faith's response:

*Then said Mariam, "Behold the slave of (the) Lord. Let it become to me according to the saying of you."*⁴

As she received the Word, the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, worked not only the Faith in her to give her the good confession. The Life-giver also worked to create life in her. From the substance of her mortal womb, the immortal God took His human nature. There, in her, without comingling or confusion of substance or essence, the eternal Son of God became the Son of Man. As God and Man in one Person, He entered His creation. He did so to be our Savior, our Jesus, as we are remembering this year at these Lenten Wednesdays. God has moved us to weekly give thanks for the central reason for which He came:

We adore You, O Lord Jesus Christ, in this Church and all the Churches of the world, and we bless You, because, by Your holy Cross You have redeemed the world. Amen.

Those words of adoration recognize that it is Jesus Who was

³ Isaiah 7:14.

⁴ Luke 1:38a.

conceived by the Holy Spirit also bore alone our sins on the Tree of Death that it might become the Tree of Life for all who look to Him in the Faith. In the Annunciation of our Lord, the Way of the Cross began in human flesh for Jesus. It ended in that flesh on the Way to rescue sinners from their sins. It is He Whose conception we recall today Who took on suffering and death to buy you back from death and hell itself.

Jesus was born of a woman. That Virgin was later recorded as having been seen standing at the foot of the cross (station seven). She who was graced by God, of His own will, of His own favor, was given grace to stand and watch her Son of the Divine die – in her sins, your sins, my sins, and the sins of the whole world.

The reality is this, that Jesus was bearing her sins also with Him. That is to say, her sins, along with ours, were on Him, covering Him, working Him into death. She who once heard these words would much later begin to grasp what they meant for her, and for you:

Behold, in you will conceive in (your) womb, and you will birth (a) Son, and you will call the Name of Him, Jesus....⁵

For He will save His people from their sins...as St. Matthew (1:21b) records the angelic message given to Mary's betrothed, Joseph in a dream. The angel gave the Name God's Son was to bear. To serve us, nine Stations affixed to the walls of this building this Lententide will serve for generations, we pray, to visually depict the price of that which His Name means.

Over the past few weeks we have heard that the value of the Stations

⁵ Luke 1:31.

of the Cross is that they assist the faithful hearer of the Word to make a small physical journey, a spiritual pilgrimage, through visual images, to the chief scenes of Christ's Way of suffering unto death. He took that Way, not for Himself, but for all sinners, for all time. That leads us to recall the reason for joy in the Mighty Man of God's message to Mary:

And having come in to her, he said, "Rejoice, O one having been bestowed grace, the Lord (is) with you!"⁶

What reason for rejoicing would come to the woman who, while engaged, had not consummated the marriage? Hers was to be a way of suffering. She would behold her Son hung on the tree of the curse. She would see Him die as a truly innocent Man on behalf of sinners.

Mary, had she been a more adept sinner, more skilled in the ways of the world, could have saved herself from all of that. This pregnancy was inconvenient to her. It could bring shame and even death by stoning to her. In a manner now being repeated against innocents in our era, this unasked for Son could have been held to have "a debt to die."

No one knew of the pregnancy, she could have terminated it without anyone ever knowing. Even Joseph her betrothed, could have been fooled – for she was still a virgin.

Yet, she had been called to rejoice. She was declared to have received grace – that is, God's unmerited favor. So, setting aside her right to choose to avoid all of that would come – even the Cross for her Son – she chose to submit to the will of God.

When the Word of God seems to bring more to you than you can

⁶ Luke 1:28.

bear, you are free to recall some of Mother Mary's other words, the Word of God which you chant each Wednesday evening here. In them, you can consider rightfully God's Word joyfully given to and through Mary, and to make them your own:

"Behold the slave of (the) Lord. Let it become to me according to the saying of you."⁷

The peace which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Annunciation, Lent V Wednesday (Stations of the Cross 1-9)

Psalm 45; Isaiah 7: 10-14; Hebrews 10:4-10; Luke 1:26-38

March 25, 2015

Pastor Michael A. Morehouse

Soli Deo Gloria

⁷ Luke 1:38a.