


The Annunciation of Our Lord
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✧ Jesu juva ✧

FAITH AND THE INCARNATION OF THE LORD
Isaiah 7:10-14; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 1:26-38

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

he prophet Isaiah said to Ahaz the king: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.” This prophecy has, of course, been fulfilled in the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We celebrated the second part of this miraculous sign at Christmas. Today we celebrate the first part: the virgin shall conceive. Today we commemorate the event of that conception, when the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and told her that she would be the mother of the Messiah, the Son of God.

It is, therefore, no coincidence that today falls exactly nine months before Christmas; and there is even evidence that the date of December 25th for Christmas is dependent upon a tradition that Jesus was conceived on the same day that He died, which some of the early church fathers had calculated to be March 25th. Well, which ever holiday came first is not of great importance to us, but the point that is of importance is that the Church has always recognized that the incarnation of our Lord was not something that began at Christmas, but at the point of conception. Yes, even in the womb of His virgin mother, Christ was active, beginning the work of our salvation.

In the Athanasian Creed we confess: “it is necessary to everlasting salvation that [we] also believe faithfully the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the right faith is, that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man; God of the Substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds; and Man of the substance of His mother, born in the world; Perfect God and perfect Man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting.” This day Perfect God, by whom all things were created and are even now upheld, entered into the womb of the virgin and took on humanity. From the womb of His mother, He takes on flesh; flesh that is undefiled in that in this conception there is neither lust in the act itself, nor transmission of original sin; for this mother is a true and undefiled virgin, as she herself states when she asks Gabriel: “How can this be, since I do not know a man?” Gabriel answers: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.” Note how Gabriel speaks here. He calls Jesus the Holy One. He has no sin, for His Father has not passed on the fallenness of Adam as human fathers do, but the Holiness of Divinity. And yet in this act of incarnation He becomes just as much a human being as you or I; and is in every way like us in respect to His humanity.

And this He does in order to save humanity from the corruption of sin. Johann Gerhard, one of the great fathers of Lutheran Church, says: “Because Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit, He is the holy Child who was born of Mary and in unity of person God’s Son, as the angel here says. Therefore our sinful conception can be sanctified by His holy conception. For by it He has earned for us that we shall not be condemned because of hereditary sin in which we were conceived and born...”

And yet our Lord is not content to let us live out of our natural conception alone. St. Paul writes: “But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.” Now this adoption is more than any ordinary sort of adoption that may occur. Jesus says: “I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” In this adoption we are actually born anew into God’s family through Christ. St. Peter says that you have “been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever.” By the Word through water, the Spirit miraculously conceives you as new person, a new man of faith, one who is God’s dear child and who bears God’s name, who now has the right and invitation, and command even, to call on God as Father: “And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’”



It is faith, created by the Holy Spirit through the Word that appropriates all of these blessings. And here we can look to the good example of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who upon receiving the angel’s explanation of the outlandish news that she would give birth to Christ, says: “Let it be to me according to your word.” And so we say to the Word of God as well. He has revealed to us so many mysteries beyond human comprehension. He has laid out such rich promises for us. He has sent His Son into our flesh. And now He calls sinners sons in His name. May He so fill us with His Holy Spirit that we may always believe and trust His Holy Word, and come to the enjoyment of all His promised blessings. Amen.

✧ Soli Deo gloria ✧