

A Retelling of the Story of the Annunciation (with thanks to St. Bernard)

In the sixth month of the Hebrew calendar, that is the third month in our modern day calendar, God sent the Angel Gabriel to a small town in Galilee called Nazareth. The angel was sent to a young maiden who was betrothed to a good man named Joseph; the maiden's name was Mary. They were both descendants of King David and so it was said that they were of the *house* of David.

Long ago, God had made a promise to Adam and Eve that He would send mankind a saviour, a champion who would overcome Satan. This covenant made to Adam was renewed by God many times through the history of salvation: Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses all received a promise from God. Eventually, He told King David that the Messiah, the one who would defeat the devil, would come from his family. Ever since then, all those who were descended from King David lived in hope that the Messiah would come during their lifetime. Now at last the moment had arrived!

Mary was not a princess living in a grand palace as we might expect, she was just an ordinary young girl, who was in her room praying silently to the Lord. All of a sudden, she looked up and, behold! there was Gabriel - whose name means God's hero - looking at her, eyes ablaze with power and might!



“Rejoice so highly favoured! The Lord is with you!” said the angel. He noticed how perturbed Mary was, (she was wondering what the angel's greeting could mean) so he added, “Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favour. Listen! You are to conceive and bear a son and you must name him Jesus – which means Saviour. He will be great and be called Son of the Most High. The Lord will give him the throne of his ancestor David and he will rule for ever and ever.”

Mary said to the angel:

“How can this happen since I am a virgin?”

“The Holy Spirit will come upon you,” the angel replied, “and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow and so the child will be holy and will be called

Son of God. Here is another piece of good news for you,” the angel continued. “Your cousin Elizabeth, who is barren, has also conceived a son and, although she is too old to have children, she is already in her sixth month; for *nothing is impossible for God!*”

How would little Mary answer God's messenger?

Ever since The Fall of mankind when Adam and Eve had tasted death and been put out of the garden of Eden, the sad old world had been waiting longingly for this moment! Poor Eve! Sitting in the shadows she looked up holding her breath (and biting her finger nails) waiting to hear Mary's answer. The prophets and holy men, Father Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and his sons, Moses, and King David - all who had believed the promise of God were waiting with baited breath for Mary's answer and the fulfilment of the Covenant to begin! The silence was deafening! Even all the animals and birds were attentive, waiting for a word of consent.

And Mary said:



“Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Let what you have said be done to me.”

And the angel left her.

And David led the singing!

“Praise the Lord all peoples of the earth, all nations give Him glory!

For strong is His love for us, His faithfulness lasts for ever!”

Mary set out straight away to the hill country of Judah where her cousin Elizabeth lived with her husband Zechariah. Mary went into their house and greeted Elizabeth. Now as soon as she heard Mary's voice the child leapt in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She gave a loud cry and exclaimed:

“Of all women you are the most blessed and blessed is the fruit of your womb! Why should I be honoured by a visit from the mother of my Lord? For the moment I heard your voice the child in my womb leapt for joy. Yes, blessed are you who believed that the promise made to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.”

Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months and then went back home to Nazareth.