

THE ANNUNCIATION

On the seventh of April, the Armenian Church celebrates the feast of the Annunciation, when the archangel Gabriel comes to Mary and tells her that she has been chosen by God to be the mother of a son who is to be called Jesus. Gabriel tells her that “he will be great, and will be called the son of the Most High . . . and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

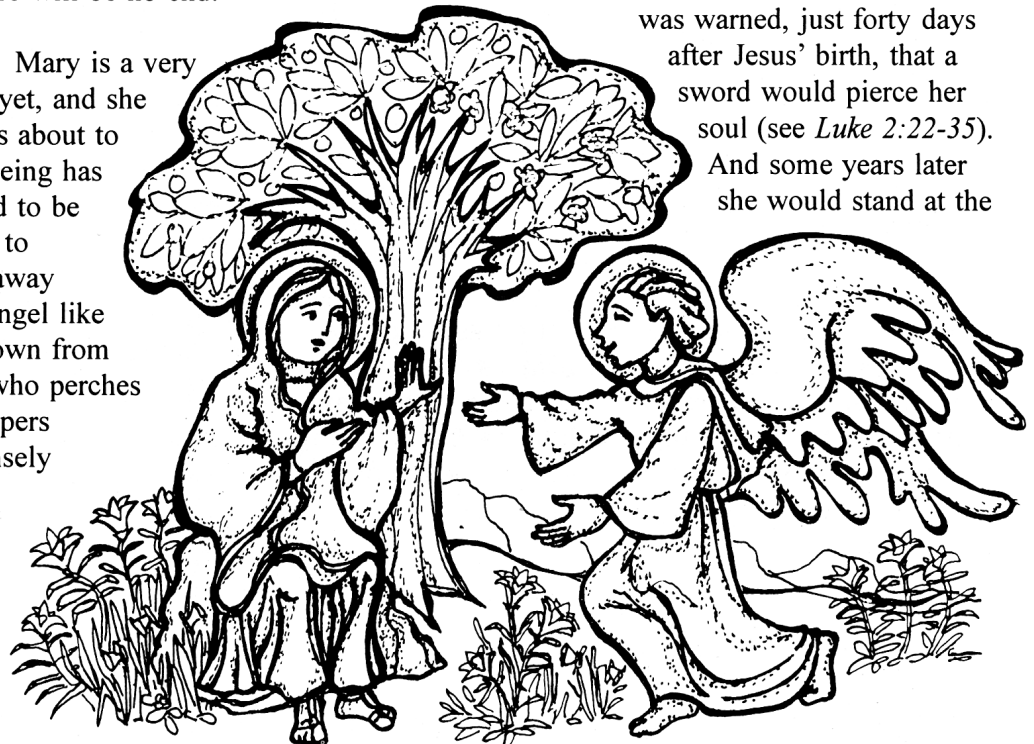
What an overwhelming message! Mary is a very young woman, not even married yet, and she is being told that her whole life is about to change in a way that no human being has ever experienced before. She had to be a pretty special person to be able to handle all this, and we see right away that she is. For a visit from an angel like Gabriel isn't just the fluttering down from the clouds of some little cherub who perches cutely on your shoulder and whispers in your ear. Gabriel is an immensely powerful, truly larger-than-life figure with an awesome job to do: he stands in God's presence to hear and then brings God's messages. Here he is, carrying a message to this young woman who has no older person standing by to shield her or speak for her. It's not very surprising that one of the first things Gabriel says is, “Do not be afraid, Mary.”

And Mary is not afraid, or at least she is not rendered speechless or faint or paralyzed by her fear. She asks a very sensible and rather blunt question: “How shall this be, since I have no husband?” Mary is a down-to-earth person. She is also an informed one who knows very well how babies are conceived.

When Gabriel tells her that God's power will accomplish this miracle he also says, “For with God nothing will be impossible.” Once she understands this, Mary has no more questions. She answers, “Let it be to me according to your word.” Could Mary have chosen *not* to go along with God's plan? Yes, she could have. But because she is a person of prayer who has worked to understand God's will, she can say “yes” when that will is revealed to her.

The Beatles picked up on the serene, calm assurance that Mary shows when they wrote their melodious song, “Let It Be.” The title and lyrics are based on these words she says to Gabriel, and the slow tempo reflects quiet wonder at the love she offers to God her Creator and God her Child.

Mary's “yes” did not mean she would have a serene life full of lovely slow songs, as we well know. She was warned, just forty days after Jesus' birth, that a sword would pierce her soul (see *Luke 2:22-35*). And some years later she would stand at the



foot of the cross, seeing her beloved son betrayed, tortured and murdered by his own people. Mary's acceptance of God's will didn't spare her the worst torment a mother can face in this world—the suffering of her child. But she continued to trust him and believe in him. She prayed, fasted, and loved others. When the Resurrection came, Mary knew that this too was God's will, and she was ready to accept it with rejoicing. We can do the same. In this month which brings us both the Annunciation and the Resurrection, we can get ourselves ready to accept whatever comes. We know that some of it will be painful and difficult, because that's the way it is in this fallen world. But we also know that, by rising from the dead, Jesus Christ has overcome the world. What will last, what will be ours forever, is a life with him that pain and death cannot touch. All we need to do is want it and make ourselves ready to receive it, as Mary did.

– Valerie Goekjian Zahirsky
Steubenville, Ohio

