

THE GREAT FEAST OF THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE THEOTOKOS

**Reader Vespers with Typika Service  
March 25**

**\*THE SERVICE TAKES PLACE IN FRONT OF OUR ICON CORNERS\***

EVERYONE: O, God cleanse me a sinner and have mercy on me! (3x)

READER: Through the Prayers of Our Holy Fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ Our God,  
Have Mercy on us.

READER: Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us. (3 times)  
Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever  
and unto ages of ages. Amen.

O most Holy Trinity, have mercy on us. Lord, cleanse from our sins.  
Master, pardon our transgressions. Holy One, visit and heal our infirmities, for Thy  
Name's sake.

Lord have mercy. Lord have mercy. Lord have mercy.  
Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever  
and unto ages of ages. Amen.

EVERYONE: Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom  
come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread;  
and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us  
not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

READER: Through the Prayers of Our Holy Fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ Our God,  
Have Mercy on us.

READER: Amen. Lord have mercy (12x)  
Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and  
unto ages of ages. Amen.  
Come, let us worship God, Our King! Come, let us worship and fall down before  
Christ, Our King and our God! Come, let us worship and fall down before Christ  
Himself, our King and our God! Come, Let us worship and fall down before Him!

Bless the LORD, O my soul! O LORD my God, You are very great:  
You are clothed with honor and majesty, Who cover *Yourself* with light as *with* a  
garment, Who stretch out the heavens like a curtain.

He lays the beams of His upper chambers in the waters,  
Who makes the clouds His chariot, Who walks on the wings of the wind,  
Who makes His angels spirits, His ministers a flame of fire.

*You who* laid the foundations of the earth, So *that* it should not be moved forever,  
You covered it with the deep as *with* a garment; The waters stood above the mountains.  
At Your rebuke they fled; At the voice of Your thunder they hastened away.  
They went up over the mountains; They went down into the valleys,  
To the place which You founded for them. You have set a boundary that they may not  
pass over, That they may not return to cover the earth.

He sends the springs into the valleys; They flow among the hills.  
They give drink to every beast of the field; The wild donkeys quench their thirst.  
By them the birds of the heavens have their home; They sing among the branches.  
He waters the hills from His upper chambers; The earth is satisfied with the fruit of  
Your works.

He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, And vegetation for the service of man, That  
he may bring forth food from the earth, And wine *that* makes glad the heart of man, Oil  
to make *his* face shine, And bread *which* strengthens man's heart.  
The trees of the LORD are full of *sap*, The cedars of Lebanon which He planted,  
Where the birds make their nests; The stork has her home in the fir trees.  
The high hills *are* for the wild goats; The cliffs are a refuge for the rock badgers.

He appointed the moon for seasons; The sun knows its going down.  
You make darkness, and it is night, In which all the beasts of the forest creep about.  
The young lions roar after their prey, And seek their food from God. *When* the sun  
rises, they gather together And lie down in their dens. Man goes out to his work And to  
his labor until the evening.

O LORD, how manifold are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all.  
The earth is full of Your possessions— This great and wide sea, In which *are*  
innumerable teeming things, Living things both small and great. There the ships sail  
about; *There is* that Leviathan Which You have made to play there.

These all wait for You, That You may give *them* their food in due season. *What* You give them they gather in; You open Your hand, they are filled with good. You hide Your face, they are troubled; You take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; And You renew the face of the earth.

May the glory of the LORD endure forever; May the LORD rejoice in His works. He looks on the earth, and it trembles; He touches the hills, and they smoke.

I will sing to the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have my being. May my meditation be sweet to Him; I will be glad in the LORD. May sinners be consumed from the earth, And the wicked be no more.

Bless the LORD, O my soul! Praise the LORD!  
Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia Glory to Thee, O God! (3x)

**THE GREAT LITANY is not said in the absence of a Priest or Deacon.**

**The Reader continues:**

READER: Amen. Lord have mercy (3x)

READER: Through the Prayers of Our Holy Fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ Our God, Have Mercy on us.

CHOIR: Amen. Followed by: 'Lord, I call upon Thee...'  
Lord, I call upon Thee, hear me! Hear me, O Lord! Lord, I call upon Thee, hear me!  
Receive the voice of my prayer, when I call upon Thee!//  
Hear me, O Lord!

Let my prayer arise in Thy sight as incense, and let the lifting up of my hands be an evening sacrifice!// Hear me, O Lord!

*Reader: (6) If Thou, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with Thee.*

In the sixth month, the Archangel was sent to the pure Virgin;  
and with his greeting "Rejoice," he announced the good news that the Deliverer was to come forth from her. Therefore, having received the salutation with faith, she conceived You, the pre-eternal God, //  
Who were well-pleased ineffably to become man// for the salvation of our souls.

*Reader: (5) For Thy name's sake I have waited for Thee, O Lord, my soul has waited for Thy word; my soul has hoped on the Lord.*

The Theotokos heard a tongue that she knew not, for the Archangel addressed to her the words of glad tidings; therefore, accepting the salutation with faith, she conceived You, the pre-eternal God. And so, rejoicing exceedingly, we too cry aloud to You: "O God made flesh from her without change, // grant peace to the world, and great mercy to our souls!"

*Reader: (4) From the morning watch until night, from the morning watch let Israel hope on the Lord!*

Behold, our restoration has now been revealed to us: in a manner beyond understanding, God is united to mankind; at the voice of the Archangel, delusion is destroyed, for the Virgin receives joy; things of the earth have become heaven; and the world is freed from the ancient curse. Let creation rejoice exceedingly and sing with voices of praise: // "O Lord, our Maker and Deliverer, glory to You!"

*Reader: (3) For with the Lord there is mercy and with Him is plenteous redemption, and He will deliver Israel from all his iniquities.*

Gabriel, the greatest of the spiritual powers, shining with heavenly brightness, who with the Hosts on High gazes upon the light of the Three-fold Sun, came to the Virgin and announced to her the good news of the divine and awesome mystery, // and he intercedes for our souls.

*Reader: (2) Praise the Lord, all nations! Praise Him, all peoples!*

The great mystery till then unknown to the Angels and hidden from all eternity has been confided to you alone, O Gabriel; and you have come to Nazareth and entrusted it to her who alone is pure. // Pray with her that our souls be granted peace and great mercy!

*Reader: (1) For His mercy is abundant towards us; and the truth of the Lord endures forever.*

Gabriel, ever filled with light, who do the will and fulfill the commands of the Ruler of All, Leader of the Angels, most excellent, preserve those who honor you with love, // pray that our souls be granted peace and great mercy!

*Reader: Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, Now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.*

The Archangel Gabriel was sent from heaven, to announce to the Virgin the good news of her conceiving. And coming to Nazareth, he was filled with wonder at the miracle, and reasoned within himself:

“How is it that He Who dwells on high, Whom none can comprehend, is to be born of a Virgin? How is He, Whose throne is Heaven and Whose footstool is the earth, to be contained in the womb of a woman? He upon Whom the six-winged Seraphim and the many-eyed Cherubim are not able to gaze is well-pleased to be made flesh from her at a single word.

It is the Word of God Who is to come. Why then do I hesitate, and not say to the Maiden: ‘Rejoice, O Lady, full of grace, the Lord is with you!

Rejoice, pure Virgin! Rejoice, Bride without Bridegroom!

Rejoice, Mother of the Life! // Blessed is the Fruit of your womb!”

CHOIR: O Gladsome Light of the holy glory of the immortal, Father heavenly, holy, blessed Jesus Christ. Now that we have come to the setting of the sun, and behold the light of evening, we praise Father, Son and Holy Spirit God. For meet it is at all times to worship Thee with voices of praise, O Son of God and Giver of life; therefore all the world glorifies Thee.

THE PROKEIMENON and THE OLD TESTAMENT READINGS

#1

READER: Let us attend!

READER: The Prokeimenon is in the 6<sup>TH</sup> Tone:

Sing to God; sing praises to His name!

CHOIR: *Sing to God; sing praises to His name!*

READER: Make ready the way for Him Who rides upon the sunset!

CHOIR: *Sing to God; sing praises to His name!*

READER: Sing to God.

CHOIR: *Sing praises to His name!*

READER: Wisdom!

Reader: The Reading is from Exodus.

READER: Let us Attend!

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush *was* not consumed. Then Moses said, "I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn." So when the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am."

Then He said, "Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand *is* holy ground." "Moreover He said, "I *am* the God of your father – the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God. And the LORD said: "I have surely seen the oppression of My people who *are* in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites.

READER: Wisdom!

*Reader:* The Reading is from Proverbs.

READER: Let us Attend!

The LORD possessed me at the beginning of His way, Before His works of old. I have been established from everlasting, From the beginning, before there was ever an earth. When *there were* no depths I was brought forth, When *there were* no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, Before the hills, I was brought forth; While as yet He had not made the earth or the fields, Or the primal dust of the world. When He prepared the heavens, I *was* there, When He drew a circle on the face of the deep, When He established the clouds above, When He strengthened the fountains of the deep, When He assigned to the sea its limit, So that the waters would not transgress His command, When He marked out the foundations of the earth, Then I was beside Him *as* a master craftsman; And I was daily *His* delight, Rejoicing always before Him.

Then we have the Little Litany followed by the remainder of the Typika Service:

**THE LITTLE LITANY**  
**is not said in the absence of a Priest or Deacon. The reader continues:**

READER: Amen. Lord have mercy (3x)

READER: Through the Prayers of Our Holy Fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ Our God, Have Mercy on us.

## THE EPISTLE LESSON

READER: The Prokeimenon is in the 4<sup>TH</sup> Tone:

From day to day proclaim the salvation of our God!

CHOIR: *From day to day proclaim the salvation of our God!*

READER: Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth!

CHOIR: *From day to day proclaim the salvation of our God!*

READER: From day to day.

CHOIR: *Proclaim the salvation of our God!*

READER: THE READING IS FROM THE LESSON OF THE HOLY APOSTLE PAUL TO THE HEBREWS.

READER:

For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying: "I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You."

And again: "I will put My trust in Him." And again: "Here am I and the children whom God has given Me." Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham.

Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.

READER: Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

CHOIR: Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

READER: He descends like rain upon the fleece, like raindrops that water the earth.

CHOIR: Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

READER: May His Name be blessed for ever; may His Name continue as long as the sun!

CHOIR: Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia

### THE GOSPEL LESSON

READER: And that we may be accounted worthy of hearing the Holy Gospel, let us pray to the Lord God.

EVERYONE: Lord have mercy (3x)

READER: Let us listen to the Holy Gospel. The Reading is from the Holy Gospel according to Saint Luke.

EVERYONE: Glory to Thee, O Lord, glory to Thee.

READER:

Let us Attend!

Now after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived; and she hid herself five months, saying, Thus the Lord has dealt with me, in the days when He looked on me, to take away my reproach among people.

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was.

Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS.

He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end."

Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?"

And the angel answered and said to her, "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. Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible."

Then Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

EVERYONE: Glory to Thee, O Lord, glory to Thee.

Remember us, O Lord, when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom.

Remember us, O Master, when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom.

Remember us, O Holy One, when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom.

**THE LITANY OF FERVENT SUPPLICATION is not said  
in the absence of a Priest or Deacon. The reader continues:**

READER: Amen. Lord have mercy (12x)

READER: Through the Prayers of Our Holy Fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ Our God, Have Mercy on us.

EVERYONE: Amen.

READER: The Heavenly Choir sings Thy praises and cries out: Holy, Holy, Holy Lord of Sabaoth; Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory.

READER: Draw nigh unto Him, and be enlightened; and your faces shall not be put to shame.

READER: The Heavenly Choir sings Thy praises and cries out: Holy, Holy, Holy Lord of Sabaoth; Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory.

READER: Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

READER: The Choir of Holy Angels and Archangels, with all the Powers of Heaven, sings Thy praises and cries out: Holy, Holy, Holy Lord of Sabaoth, Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory.

### **THE SYMBOL OF FAITH (THE NICENE CREED)**

PEOPLE: I BELIEVE IN ONE GOD, THE FATHER ALMIGHTY; MAKER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH, AND OF ALL THINGS VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE.

AND IN ONE LORD, JESUS CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD, THE ONLY-BEGOTTEN; BEGOTTEN OF THE FATHER BEFORE ALL AGES. LIGHT OF LIGHT, TRUE GOD OF TRUE GOD; BEGOTTEN NOT MADE; OF ONE ESSENCE WITH THE FATHER, BY WHOM ALL THINGS WERE MADE; WHO FOR US MEN AND FOR OUR SALVATION CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN, AND WAS INCARNATE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE VIRGIN MARY AND BECAME MAN. AND HE WAS CRUCIFIED FOR US UNDER PONTIUS PILATE, AND SUFFERED, AND WAS BURIED; AND ON THE THIRD DAY HE ROSE AGAIN, ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES; AND HE ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN, AND SITS AT THE RIGHT HAND OF THE FATHER; AND HE SHALL COME AGAIN WITH GLORY TO JUDGE THE LIVING AND THE DEAD; WHOSE KINGDOM SHALL HAVE NO END.

AND IN THE HOLY SPIRIT, THE LORD, THE GIVER OF LIFE, WHO PROCEEDS FROM THE FATHER; WHO WITH THE FATHER, AND THE SON TOGETHER IS WORSHIPPED AND GLORIFIED; WHO SPOKE BY THE PROPHETS.

IN ONE, HOLY, CATHOLIC, AND APOSTOLIC CHURCH; I ACKNOWLEDGE ONE BAPTISM FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS. I LOOK FOR THE

RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD, AND THE LIFE OF THE WORLD TO COME.  
AMEN.

THE LITANY OF SUPPLICATION is not said  
in the absence of a Priest or Deacon. The reader continues:

READER: Amen. Lord have mercy (12x)

READER: Through the Prayers of Our Holy Fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ Our God,  
Have Mercy on us.

EVERYONE: OUR FATHER, WHO ART IN HEAVEN, HALLOWED BY THY NAME.  
THY KINGDOM COME. THY WILL BE DONE, ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN.  
GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD; AND FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES, AS  
WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US; AND LEAD US NOT INTO  
TEMPTATION, BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL.

READER: Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God,  
have mercy on us and save us.

EVERYONE: Amen. (Followed by the singing of the appointed Tropar and Kontakia)

Troparion for Feast of The Annunciation – Tone 4

Today is the beginning of our salvation, the revelation of the eternal mystery! The Son  
of God becomes the Son of the Virgin as Gabriel announces the coming of Grace.  
Together with him let us cry to the Theotokos: Rejoice, O Full of Grace, // the Lord is  
with thee!

*Glory to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of  
ages. Amen.*

Kontakion for Feast of The Annunciation – Tone 8

O victorious leader of triumphant hosts! We thy servants, delivered from evil sing our  
grateful thanks to thee, O Theotokos. As thou dost possess invincible might, set us free  
from every calamity so that we may sing: “Rejoice, O unwedded Bride!”

READER: Lord have mercy (12x)

O All-Holy Trinity, Consubstantial Power, Undivided Kingdom, Origin of all  
Good: be graciously inclined unto me, a sinner. Make steadfast my heart and give it

understanding, and take away from me every defilement. Enlighten my mind, that I may ever glorify, praise and worship Thee, and say: One is Holy, One is the Lord Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Blessed be the Name of the Lord, henceforth and forevermore. (3x)

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

### PSALM 34

*READER:* I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall be continually in my mouth. In the Lord shall my soul be praised; let the meek hear and be glad. O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together. I sought the Lord, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my troubles. Draw nigh unto Him, and be enlightened, and your faces shall not be put to shame. This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. The Angel of the Lord will encamp around those who fear Him, and will deliver them.

O taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man that hopes in Him. O fear the Lord, all you His saints; for there is no want for them that fear Him. The rich have become poor and have hungered; but they that seek the Lord shall lack no good thing. Come, O children, hearken unto me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord. Who is the man that desires life, who loves to see days that are good? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking deceit. Turn away from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.

The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears unto their supplication. The face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth. The righteous cried, and the Lord hear them, and He delivered them out of all their troubles. The Lord is nigh unto them that are broken in heart, and will save them that are humble in spirit.

Many are the afflictions of the righteous, and out of them all shall the Lord deliver them. The Lord keeps all of their bones; not one of them shall be broken. The death of sinners is cruel, and they that hate the righteous shall do wrong. The Lord will redeem the soul of His servants, and none of them shall do wrong that hope in Him.

*CHOIR:* Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen. Lord have mercy. Lord have mercy. Lord have mercy. Lord Bless!

*READER:* Through the Prayers of our Holy Fathers, through the Prayers of the Most Holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, by the Power of the Precious and Life-Creating Cross, through the protection of the Bodiless Powers of Heaven, through the prayers of Holy Glorious Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist John, through the prayers of the holy glorious and all-laudable Apostles, through the Prayers of all the North American Saints, through the prayers of \_\_\_\_\_ the patron of this Holy Temple, of The Great Feast of The Annunciation of The Most-Holy Theotokos which we celebrate today, of the holy and righteous Ancestors of God, Joachim and Anna, and of all the saints, O Lord Jesus Christ Our God, have mercy on us and save us.

*CHOIR:* Amen.

*CHOIR:*

Before Thy Cross, we bow down in worship, O Master,  
and Thy holy Resurrection, we glorify. *Prostration*

Before Thy Cross, we bow down in worship, O Master,  
and Thy holy Resurrection, we glorify. *prostration*

Before Thy Cross, we bow down in worship, O Master,  
and Thy holy Resurrection, we glorify. *prostration*

*(The faithful now come up and venerate  
the Precious Cross and Icons in our Icon Corner.)*

*READER:* Through the Prayers of our Holy Fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us and save us.

*CHOIR:* Amen. Lord have mercy. Lord have mercy. Lord have mercy.

## THE DIOCESE OF NEW YORK and NEW JERSEY EDUCATION CORNER"

### THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE MOST HOLY THEOTOKOS

The Feast of the Annunciation is one of the earliest Christian feasts, and was already being celebrated in the fourth century. There is a painting of the Annunciation in the catacomb of Priscilla in Rome dating from the second century. The Council of Toledo in 656 mentions the Feast, and the Council in Trullo in 692 says that the Annunciation was celebrated during Great Lent.

The Greek and Slavonic names for the Feast may be translated as "good tidings." This, of course, refers to the Incarnation of the Son of God and the salvation He brings. The background of the Annunciation is found in the Gospel of St Luke (1:26-38). The troparion describes this as the "beginning of our salvation, and the revelation of the eternal mystery," for on this day the Son of God became the Son of Man.

There are two main components to the Annunciation: the message itself, and the response of the Virgin. The message fulfills God's promise to send a Redeemer (Genesis 3:15): "I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed; he shall crush your head, and you shall lie in wait for his heel." The Fathers of the Church understand "her seed" to refer to Christ. The prophets hinted at His coming, which they saw dimly, but the Archangel Gabriel now proclaims that the promise is about to be fulfilled.

We see this echoed in the Liturgy of St Basil, as well: "When man disobeyed Thee, the only true God who had created him, and was deceived by the guile of the serpent, becoming subject to death by his own transgressions, Thou, O God, in Thy righteous judgment, didst send him forth from Paradise into this world, returning him to the earth from which he was taken, yet providing for him the salvation of regeneration in Thy Christ Himself."

The Archangel Gabriel was sent by God to Nazareth in Galilee. There he spoke to the undefiled Virgin who was betrothed to St Joseph: "Hail, thou who art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end."

In contrast to Eve, who was readily deceived by the serpent, the Virgin did not immediately accept the Angel's message. In her humility, she did not think she was deserving of such words, but was actually troubled by them. The fact that she asked for an explanation reveals her sobriety and prudence. She did not disbelieve the words of the angel, but could not understand how they would be fulfilled, for they spoke of something which was beyond nature.

Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" (Luke 1:34).

"And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee: therefore also that which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible.' And Mary said, 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.' And the angel departed from her" (Luke 1: 35-38)."

In his Sermon 23 on the day of the Annunciation, St Philaret of Moscow boldly stated that "the word of the creature brought the Creator down into the world." He explains that salvation is not merely an act of God's will, but also involves the Virgin's free will. She could have refused, but she accepted God's will and chose to cooperate without complaint or further questions.

The icon of the Feast shows the Archangel with a staff in his left hand, indicating his role as a messenger. Sometimes one wing is upraised, as if to show his swift descent from heaven. His right hand is stretched toward the holy Virgin as he delivers his message.

The Virgin is depicted either standing or sitting, usually holding yarn in her left hand. Sometimes she is shown holding a scroll. Her right hand may be raised to indicate her surprise at the message she is hearing. Her head is bowed, showing her consent and obedience. The descent of the Holy Spirit upon her is depicted by a ray of light issuing from a small sphere at the top of the icon, which symbolizes heaven. In a famous icon from Sinai, a white dove is shown in the ray of light.

There are several famous icons of the Annunciation. One is in the Moscow Kremlin in the church of the Annunciation. This icon appeared in connection with the rescue of a prisoner by the Mother of God during the reign of Ivan the Terrible. Another is to be found in the Dormition Cathedral in Moscow (July 8). It was originally located in Ustiug, and was the icon before which St Procopius the fool (July 8) prayed to save the city from destruction in 1290. One of the most highly revered icons in Greece is the Tinos icon of the Annunciation (January 30).

The Annunciation falls during Lent, but it is always celebrated with great joy. The Liturgy of St Basil or St John Chrysostom is served, even on the weekdays of Lent. It is one of the two days of Great Lent on which the fast is relaxed and fish is permitted (Palm Sunday is the other).