

- More than 2000 years ago, the Archangel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary.
- And coming to her, the angel said: "Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you" (cf. Luke 1:26-28).
- It's extraordinary to think of an archangel appearing to anyone. Angels are part of the invisible world. While we know by faith that they exist, very few souls ever see them.
- Yet what is even more extraordinary is the invitation St. Gabriel made to the Virgin Mary: to become the Mother of God!
- St. Gabriel said: "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus."
- At that point in human history, the world had long known the darkness of sin into which it was plunged by the willfulness of our first parents. Man was in desperate need of a savior, and through the Jewish people longed for and awaited the Messiah who was to come.
- "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to ransom those under the law, so that we might receive adoption." (Gal 4)
- And this woman, within whose hands God saw fit to place the salvation of all of mankind: past, present, and future, was Mary. For without the consent of Mary's will, Christ would not have taken on our human flesh and become that long-awaited Messiah.
- Mary alone was prepared for this task – chosen from all other women God would ever create. He even gave Mary the unique grace of being conceived in the womb of our lovely patroness, St. Ann, without any trace of sin.
- This He did so that Mary would have the dignity necessary to be the Mother of Jesus, which is why St. Gabriel addressed her as: "full of grace," and why her cousin Elizabeth declared her to be "blessed among women."
- Yet our Lord did not take away Mary's free will. Though graced beyond measure, Our Lady still maintained the capacity and freedom to sin.
- We might be tempted to think that because she had been so graced that Mary couldn't possibly sin or refuse God's will, but remember: Eve, too, was conceived without original sin, and she managed to turn away from God.
- Thus in both women we see clearly how potent and powerful one's act of the will can be.
- In Eve's proud act of disobedience, our human nature was devastated by sin. Yet in Mary's humble obedience, we are given the remedy for our broken humanity.
- Eve unleashed the darkness of sin and death into our world, yet Mary gave birth to the Light of the World, the Light that the darkness cannot overcome.
- Knowing all that was at stake in that moment in which God's will was made known to Mary, we can see how this little tête-à-tête between Our Lady and St. Gabriel was more than just a historical event.
- While in earthly terms we reckon the mystery of the Annunciation as an event occurring some 2000 years ago in a place that we can visit even today, we mustn't reduce what happened between the angel and Our Lady to its bare historical facts.

- While we can go to Nazareth today, and still see the place where Gabriel spoke to Mary, preserved as it is as an archeological site within the crypt of the Basilica of the Annunciation, we mustn't bind ourselves only to material consolations of the visible world.
- No, we must look with the eyes of faith, and see the supernatural elements of this event. As St. Gabriel invited Our Lady into her unique role in salvation history, all of our forebears who had died and were eagerly awaiting the opening of Heaven's gates were watching too!
- Sorrowful Adam and Eve, faithful Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah, and all the patriarchs and prophets were watching and praying for Mary to say yes!
- For they knew that with her yes would be born the Messiah, Who would bring glad tidings to the poor, proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, and let the oppressed go free (cf. Luke 4:18).
- Upon her yes depended the salvation of all the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve, of the whole human race! And because she said yes, today we celebrate the birth of our Savior, Who is the blessed fruit of Mary's womb and of Mary's will.
- Yet for those of us who mark Christmas not simply as a secular winterfest in which we indulge our gluttonous and materialistic desires, for those of us who know this holiday is a *holy* day, Christmas is more than just the very happy anniversary of our Savior's birth.
- We've spent our Advent preparing not only for a birthday celebration, but for our Lord's coming! Our liturgy proclaims that Christ *comes* to us at Christmas, desiring to dwell within our souls, just as He dwelt within Mary's womb.
- The question, of course, is this: will we say yes to God as did Mary? While Jesus does not invite us to be His mother, our Lord does invite us to be His brothers and sisters and co-heirs to His Father's Kingdom.
- While this invitation is made in a special way to us at Christmas when we mark our Lord's birth, in truth it's an invitation that is ever before us.
- So shall we follow God's will or not? Shall we be open to being filled with His grace by being humbly obedient to what He asks of us?
- My brothers and sisters, our will is a very powerful thing, indeed, and the acts of the will we make can affect not only us, but so many others as well – helping them or hurting them on the way to salvation.
- Like Our Lady, may we always be open and obedient to God and His plans for our life.
- And in opening our hearts and souls to Him in this life, may we trust He will open the Gates of Heaven to us in the next.
- A blessed Christmas to you all.