

- Christmas is almost upon us! In just 5 days, we will celebrate the humble birth of our glorious Savior! And as Christmas nears, Holy Mother Church turns to Mary as we hear the story of the Annunciation.
- And in this story that we all know so well, we see the radiant beauty of our Lady's humility.
- Upon being referred to as "full of grace" by St. Gabriel, Luke's Gospel records that Mary "was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be."
- But our Lady's confusion at the archangel's greeting betrays her profound humility. To her humble mind, she can only wonder why she should be called "full of grace."
- Thus it is that good St. Gabriel sets our Lady at ease and explains to this Virgin of Virgins that she has been chosen by God to bear His only begotten Son.
- Her questioning of how this could be since she has had no relations with a man is not an instance of doubt or incredulity, but rather our Lady, in her magnificent simplicity, is responding forthrightly to the apparent contradiction that she should remain a virgin and yet become a mother.
- And when the archangel responds to her question by retelling the prophecy from Isaiah, a prophecy that would have been well known to Mary, she neither demurs nor responds with zealous bravado.
- Rather, our Lady once again shows forth the greatness of her humility by calling herself "the handmaid of the Lord," and by uniting her will to our Lord's will.
- Faithful in every regard, Mary lovingly and obediently accepts God's will with complete confidence in His mercy, goodness, and power, realizing that it is only by God's grace that she has been found worthy of such an honor.
- And because of this, because of Mary's fiat, the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us, and the salvation of mankind becomes possible!
- But even more specifically, our Lord made His dwelling *in Mary!* She is the new earthly dwelling place of our Lord, in contrast to the great Temple we hear King David planning in our 1st reading.
- The Fathers of the Church loved to study Sacred Scripture in order to draw connections and find parallels. And one of the great parallels of Scripture is that of Mary and the Temple, and specifically the Ark of the Covenant.
- The Ark of the Covenant was kept in the Holy of Holies, which was, therefore, the most important and sacred part of the Jewish Temple, for it was the place that contained the very presence of God.
- As it was the most sacred place in the Temple, the high priest entered the Holy of Holies only once a year, on the Day of Atonement. As he did so, he went with a rope tied to his leg so that he could be pulled out in case he was struck dead for improper behavior.
- In combing through the Old Testament, the Church Fathers found many parallels between the Temple with its Ark of the Covenant and our Lady. They understood each of these Old Testament stories about the Ark to prefigure what we know of Jesus and Mary.
- For example, Exodus 40 speaks of how the Holy Spirit of God overshadowed and then dwelled within the Ark of the Covenant, using the same language we find in today's Gospel in which Mary is overshadowed by the Holy Spirit so that Christ may dwell within her.

- 2 Samuel tells the story of how the Ark of the Covenant was taken to the hill country of Judah to abide in the house of Obed-edom for 3 months, while Luke's Gospel speaks of how Mary traveled to the hill country of Judah to visit Elizabeth for 3 months.
- 2 Samuel goes on to tell of how King David danced and leapt for joy in the presence of the Ark of the Covenant, prefiguring John the Baptist doing the same in Elizabeth's womb.
- There are several other examples like this that show how Mary is the new and even improved Ark of the Covenant, the inviolate dwelling place of God which no man may enter. She is the virginal temple of the Most High, from which will come forth Christ our Savior.
- And because of this: because she is the ever-virgin and ever-sinless Mother of God, because she is "the handmaid of the Lord," who perfectly united herself to our Lord's will, Mary holds an esteemed and privileged place within the heart of our Catholic Faith.
- Faithful in every regard, Mary lovingly and obediently accepted God's will with complete confidence in His mercy, goodness, and power, realizing that it is only by God's grace that she could be found worthy of the honors bestowed upon her.
- But our Lady is not merely an icon that we are called to respect. She is a mother we are called to love, to trust, and to imitate.
- As I mentioned earlier, Mary models for us the virtues of humility, simplicity, forthrightness, undoubting confidence, and obedience to God – all virtues that we must master if we wish to become the holy people God has created us to be.
- In this final week of Advent, and at the end of a year of so much suffering and difficulty, let us humbly immerse ourselves in prayerful union with our Lady, looking to her as our model of how to prepare for our Lord's coming.
- For so many in our world, Christmas is nothing more than a secular holiday: a time to indulge in materialism and gluttony. Yet for us Christians, Christmas is a time to celebrate the great miracle of our Lord's Incarnation and birth.
- Christmas shows us God's goodness and mercy, as well as His omnipotence.
- And in the example of our Lady, we see how we are to respond to such a great mystery: by begging our Lord for His mercy with complete confidence in His goodness, and anticipating His coming with ready obedience to do His will.
- In this difficult year in which we need our Lord's goodness and mercy more than ever, may we be like Mary as we await Him: humble, confident, obedient, and seeking to unite ourselves to God's holy will.
- May He come quickly and not delay. And may our Lady, model and pillar of every virtue, intercede for us and care for us so that we may find ourselves fully prepared at our Lord's coming.
- Mary, Mother of God yet Daughter of our Patroness, pray for us.