

**THIRD PART, QUESTION 30**  
**Of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin**  
*(In Four Articles)*

We now have to consider the Blessed Virgin's Annunciation, concerning which there are four points of inquiry:

- (1) Whether it was befitting that announcement should be made to her of that which was to be begotten of her?
- (2) By whom should this announcement be made?
- (3) In what manner should this announcement be made?
- (4) Of the order observed in the Annunciation.

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**Whether it was necessary to announce to the Blessed Virgin that which was to be done in her?**

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IIIa q. 30 a. 1

**Objection 1.** It would seem that it was unnecessary to announce to the Blessed Virgin that which was to be done in her. For there seems to have been no need of the Annunciation except for the purpose of receiving the Virgin's consent. But her consent seems to have been unnecessary: because the Virginal Conception was foretold by a prophecy of "predestination," which is "fulfilled without our consent," as a gloss says on Mat. 1:22. There was no need, therefore, for this Annunciation.

**Objection 2.** Further, the Blessed Virgin believed in the Incarnation, for to disbelieve therein excludes man from the way of salvation; because, as the Apostle says (Rom. 3:22): "The justice of God (is) by faith of Jesus Christ." But one needs no further instruction concerning what one believes without doubt. Therefore the Blessed Virgin had no need for the Incarnation of her Son to be announced to her.

**Objection 3.** Further, just as the Blessed Virgin conceived Christ in her body, so every pious soul conceives Him spiritually. Thus the Apostle says (Gal. 4:19): "My little children, of whom I am in labor again, until Christ be formed in you." But to those who conceive Him spiritually no announcement is made of this conception. Therefore neither should it have been announced to the Blessed Virgin that she was to conceive the Son of God in her womb.

**On the contrary,** It is related (Lk. 1:31) that the angel said to her: "Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a son."

**I answer that,** It was reasonable that it should be announced to the Blessed Virgin that she was to conceive

Christ. First, in order to maintain a becoming order in the union of the Son of God with the Virgin—namely, that she should be informed in mind concerning Him, before conceiving Him in the flesh. Thus Augustine says (*De Sancta Virgine*. iii): "Mary is more blessed in receiving the faith of Christ, than in conceiving the flesh of Christ"; and further on he adds: "Her nearness as a Mother would have been of no profit to Mary, had she not borne Christ in her heart after a more blessed manner than in her flesh."

Secondly, that she might be a more certain witness of this mystery, being instructed therein by God.

Thirdly, that she might offer to God the free gift of her obedience: which she proved herself right ready to do, saying: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord."

Fourthly, in order to show that there is a certain spiritual wedlock between the Son of God and human nature. Wherefore in the Annunciation the Virgin's consent was besought in lieu of that of the entire human nature.

**Reply to Objection 1.** The prophecy of predestination is fulfilled without the causality of our will; not without its consent.

**Reply to Objection 2.** The Blessed Virgin did indeed believe explicitly in the future Incarnation; but, being humble, she did not think such high things of herself. Consequently she required instruction in this matter.

**Reply to Objection 3.** The spiritual conception of Christ through faith is preceded by the preaching of the faith, for as much as "faith is by hearing" (Rom. 10:17). Yet man does not know for certain thereby that he has grace; but he does know that the faith, which he has received, is true.

**Objection 1.** It would seem that the Annunciation should not have been made by an angel to our Blessed Lady. For revelations to the highest angels are made immediately by God, as Dionysius says (Coel. Hier. vii). But the Mother of God is exalted above all the angels. Therefore it seems that the mystery of the Incarnation should have been announced to her by God immediately, and not by an angel.

**Objection 2.** Further, if in this matter it behooved the common order to be observed, by which Divine things are announced to men by angels; in like manner Divine things are announced to a woman by a man: wherefore the Apostle says (1 Cor. 14:34,35): “Let women keep silence in the churches. . . but if they would learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home.” Therefore it seems that the mystery of the Incarnation should have been announced to the Blessed Virgin by some man: especially seeing that Joseph, her husband, was instructed thereupon by an angel, as is related (Mat. 1:20,21)

**Objection 3.** Further, none can becomingly announce what he knows not. But the highest angels did not fully know the mystery of the Incarnation: wherefore Dionysius says (Coel. Hier. vii) that the question, “Who is this that cometh from Edom?” (Is. 63:1) is to be understood as made by them. Therefore it seems that the announcement of the Incarnation could not be made becomingly by any angel.

**Objection 4.** Further, greater things should be announced by messengers of greater dignity. But the mystery of the Incarnation is the greatest of all things announced by angels to men. It seems, therefore, if it behooved to be announced by an angel at all, that this should have been done by an angel of the highest order. But Gabriel is not of the highest order, but of the order of archangels, which is the last but one: wherefore the Church sings: “We know that the archangel Gabriel brought thee a message from God”\*. Therefore this announcement was not becomingly made by the archangel Gabriel.

**On the contrary,** It is written (Lk. 1:26): “The angel Gabriel was sent by God,” etc.

**I answer that,** It was fitting for the mystery of the Incarnation to be announced to the Mother of God by an angel, for three reasons. First, that in this also might be maintained the order established by God, by which Divine things are brought to men by means of the angels. Wherefore Dionysius says (Coel. Hier. iv) that “the angels were the first to be taught the Divine mystery of the loving kindness of Jesus: afterwards the grace of knowledge was im-

parted to us through them. Thus, then, the most god-like Gabriel made known to Zachary that a prophet son would be born to him; and, to Mary, how the Divine mystery of the ineffable conception of God would be realized in her.”

Secondly, this was becoming to the restoration of human nature which was to be effected by Christ. Wherefore Bede says in a homily (in Annunt.): “It was an apt beginning of man’s restoration that an angel should be sent by God to the Virgin who was to be hallowed by the Divine Birth: since the first cause of man’s ruin was through the serpent being sent by the devil to cajole the woman by the spirit of pride.”

Thirdly, because this was becoming to the virginity of the Mother of God. Wherefore Jerome says in a sermon on the Assumption<sup>†</sup>: “It is well that an angel be sent to the Virgin; because virginity is ever akin to the angelic nature. Surely to live in the flesh and not according to the flesh is not an earthly but a heavenly life.”

**Reply to Objection 1.** The Mother of God was above the angels as regards the dignity to which she was chosen by God. But as regards the present state of life, she was beneath the angels. For even Christ Himself, by reason of His passible life, “was made a little lower than the angels,” according to Heb. 2:9. But because Christ was both wayfarer and comprehensor, He did not need to be instructed by angels, as regards knowledge of Divine things. The Mother of God, however, was not yet in the state of comprehension: and therefore she had to be instructed by angels concerning the Divine Conception.

**Reply to Objection 2.** As Augustine says in a sermon on the Assumption (De Assump. B.V.M.<sup>‡</sup>) a true estimation of the Blessed Virgin excludes her from certain general rules. For “neither did she ‘multiply her conceptions’ nor was she ‘under man’s, i.e. her husband’s,’ power (Gn. 3:16), who in her spotless womb conceived Christ of the Holy Ghost.” Therefore it was fitting that she should be informed of the mystery of the Incarnation by means not of a man, but of an angel. For this reason it was made known to her before Joseph: since the message was brought to her before she conceived, but to Joseph after she had conceived.

**Reply to Objection 3.** As may be gathered from the passage quoted from Dionysius, the angels were acquainted with the mystery of the Incarnation: and yet they put this question, being desirous that Christ should give them more perfect knowledge of the details of this mystery, which are incomprehensible to any created intellect. Thus Maximus<sup>§</sup> says that “there can be no question that the angels knew that the Incarnation was to take place. But

\* Feast of Purification B.V.M. ix Resp. Brev. O.P. † Ascribed to St. Jerome but not his work ‡ Work of another author: among the works of St. Augustine § Maximus of Constantinople

it was not given to them to trace the manner of our Lord's conception, nor how it was that He remained whole in the Father, whole throughout the universe, and was whole in the narrow abode of the Virgin."

**Reply to Objection 4.** Some say that Gabriel was of the highest order; because Gregory says (Hom. de Centum Ovibus\*): "It was right that one of the highest angels should come, since his message was most sublime." But this does not imply that he was of the highest order of all, but in regard to the angels: since he was an

archangel. Thus the Church calls him an archangel, and Gregory himself in a homily (De Centum Ovibus 34) says that "those are called archangels who announce sublime things." It is therefore sufficiently credible that he was the highest of the archangels. And, as Gregory says (De Centum Ovibus 34), this name agrees with his office: for "Gabriel means 'Power of God.' This message therefore was fittingly brought by the 'Power of God,' because the Lord of hosts and mighty in battle was coming to overcome the powers of the air."

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**Whether the angel of annunciation should have appeared to the Virgin in a bodily vision?**

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IIIa q. 30 a. 3

**Objection 1.** It would seem that the angel of the Annunciation should not have appeared to the Virgin in a bodily vision. For "intellectual vision is more excellent than bodily vision," as Augustine says (Gen. ad lit. xii), and especially more becoming to an angel: since by intellectual vision an angel is seen in his substance; whereas in a bodily vision he is seen in the bodily shape which he assumes. Now since it behooved a sublime messenger to come to announce the Divine Conception, so, seemingly, he should have appeared in the most excellent kind of vision. Therefore it seems that the angel of the Annunciation appeared to the Virgin in an intellectual vision.

**Objection 2.** Further, imaginary vision also seems to excel bodily vision: just as the imagination is a higher power than the senses. But "the angel... appeared to Joseph in his sleep" (Mat. 1:20), which was clearly an imaginary vision. Therefore it seems that he should have appeared to the Blessed Virgin also in an imaginary vision.

**Objection 3.** Further, the bodily vision of a spiritual substance stupefies the beholder; thus we sing of the Virgin herself: "And the Virgin seeing the light was filled with fear"<sup>†</sup>. But it was better that her mind should be preserved from being thus troubled. Therefore it was not fitting that this announcement should be made in a bodily vision.

**On the contrary,** Augustine in a sermon (De Annunt. iii) pictures the Blessed Virgin as speaking thus: "To me came the archangel Gabriel with glowing countenance, gleaming robe, and wondrous step." But these cannot pertain to other than bodily vision. Therefore the angel of the Annunciation appeared in a bodily vision to the Blessed Virgin.

**I answer that,** The angel of the Annunciation appeared in a bodily vision to the Blessed Virgin. And this indeed was fitting, first in regard to that which was announced. For the angel came to announce the Incarnation of the invisible God. Wherefore it was becoming that, in

order to make this known, an invisible creature should assume a form in which to appear visibly: forasmuch as all the apparitions of the Old Testament are ordered to that apparition in which the Son of God appeared in the flesh.

Secondly, it was fitting as regards the dignity of the Mother of God, who was to receive the Son of God not only in her mind, but in her bodily womb. Therefore it behooved not only her mind, but also her bodily senses to be refreshed by the angelic vision.

Thirdly, it is in keeping with the certainty of that which was announced. For we apprehend with greater certainty that which is before our eyes, than what is in our imagination. Thus Chrysostom says (Hom. iv in Matth.) that the angel "came to the Virgin not in her sleep, but visibly. For since she was receiving from the angel a message exceeding great, before such an event she needed a vision of great solemnity."

**Reply to Objection 1.** Intellectual vision excels merely imaginary and merely bodily vision. But Augustine himself says (De Annunt. iii) that prophecy is more excellent if accompanied by intellectual and imaginary vision, than if accompanied by only one of them. Now the Blessed Virgin perceived not only the bodily vision, but also the intellectual illumination. Wherefore this was a more excellent vision. Yet it would have been more excellent if she had perceived the angel himself in his substance by her intellectual vision. But it was incompatible with her state of wayfarer that she should see an angel in his essence.

**Reply to Objection 2.** The imagination is indeed a higher power than the exterior sense: but because the senses are the principle of human knowledge, the greatest certainty is in them, for the principles of knowledge must needs always be most certain. Consequently Joseph, to whom the angel appeared in his sleep, did not have so excellent a vision as the Blessed Virgin.

**Reply to Objection 3.** As Ambrose says on Lk. 1:11: "We are disturbed, and lose our presence of mind, when

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\* 34 in Evang. † Feast of Annunciation, B.V.M. ii Resp. Brev. O.P.

we are confronted by the presence of a superior power.” And this happens not only in bodily, but also in imaginary vision. Wherefore it is written (Gn. 15:12) that “when the sun was setting, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a great and darksome horror seized upon him.” But by being thus disturbed man is not harmed to such an extent that therefore he ought to forego the vision of an angel. First because from the very fact that man is raised above himself, in which matter his dignity is concerned, his inferior powers are weakened; and from this results the aforesaid disturbance: thus, also, when the natural heat is drawn within a body, the exterior parts tremble. Secondly, because, as Origen says (Hom. iv in Luc.): “The angel who appeared, knowing hers was a human nature, first sought to remedy the disturbance of mind to which a man is subject.” Wherefore both to Zachary and to Mary, as soon as

they were disturbed, he said: “Fear not.” For this reason, as we read in the life of Anthony, “it is difficult to discern good from evil spirits. For if joy succeed fear, we should know that the help is from the Lord: because security of soul is a sign of present majesty. But if the fear with which we are stricken persevere, it is an enemy that we see.”

Moreover it was becoming to virginal modesty that the Virgin should be troubled. Because, as Ambrose says on Lk. 1:20: “It is the part of a virgin to be timid, to fear the advances of men, and to shrink from men’s addresses.”

But others says that as the Blessed Virgin was accustomed to angelic visions, she was not troubled at seeing this angel, but with wonder at hearing what the angel said to her, for she did not think so highly of herself. Wherefore the evangelist does not say that she was troubled at seeing the angel, but “at his saying.”

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**Whether the Annunciation took place in becoming order?**

IIIa q. 30 a. 4

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**Objection 1.** It would seem that the Annunciation did not take place in becoming order. For the dignity of the Mother of God results from the child she conceived. But the cause should be made known before the effect. Therefore the angel should have announced to the Virgin the conception of her child before acknowledging her dignity in greeting her.

**Objection 2.** Further, proof should be omitted in things which admit of no doubt; and premised where doubt is possible. But the angel seems first to have announced what the virgin might doubt, and which, because of her doubt, would make her ask: “How shall this be done?” and afterwards to have given the proof, alleging both the instance of Elizabeth and the omnipotence of God. Therefore the Annunciation was made by the angel in unbecoming order.

**Objection 3.** Further, the greater cannot be adequately proved by the less. But it was a greater wonder for a virgin than for an old woman to be with child. Therefore the angel’s proof was insufficient to demonstrate the conception of a virgin from that of an old woman.

**On the contrary,** it is written (Rom. 13:1): “Those that are of God, are well ordered [Vulg.: ‘Those that are, are ordained of God’].” Now the angel was “sent by God” to announce unto the Virgin, as is related Lk. 1:26. Therefore the Annunciation was made by the angel in the most perfect order.

**I answer that,** The Annunciation was made by the angel in a becoming manner. For the angel had a threefold purpose in regard to the Virgin. First, to draw her attention to the consideration of a matter of such moment. This he did by greeting her by a new and unwonted salutation. Wherefore Origen says, commenting on Luke (Hom. vi), that if “she had known that similar words had been ad-

dressed to anyone else, she, who had knowledge of the Law, would never have been astonished at the seeming strangeness of the salutation.” In which salutation he began by asserting her worthiness of the conception, by saying, “Full of grace”; then he announced the conception in the words, “The Lord is with thee”; and then foretold the honor which would result to her therefrom, by saying, “Blessed art thou among women.”

Secondly, he purposed to instruct her about the mystery of the Incarnation, which was to be fulfilled in her. This he did by foretelling the conception and birth, saying: “Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb,” etc.; and by declaring the dignity of the child conceived, saying: “He shall be great”; and further, by making known the mode of conception, when he said: “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee.”

Thirdly, he purposed to lead her mind to consent. This he did by the instance of Elizabeth, and by the argument from Divine omnipotence.

**Reply to Objection 1.** To a humble mind nothing is more astonishing than to hear its own excellence. Now, wonder is most effective in drawing the mind’s attention. Therefore the angel, desirous of drawing the Virgin’s attention to the hearing of so great a mystery, began by praising her.

**Reply to Objection 2.** Ambrose says explicitly on Lk. 1:34, that the Blessed Virgin did not doubt the angel’s words. For he says: “Mary’s answer is more temperate than the words of the priest. She says: How shall this be? He replies: Whereby shall I know this? He denies that he believes, since he denies that he knows this. She does not doubt fulfilment when she asks how it shall be done.”

Augustine, however, seems to assert that she doubted. For he says (De Qq. Vet. et Nov. Test. qu. li): “To Mary,

in doubt about the conception, the angel declares the possibility thereof.” But such a doubt is one of wonder rather than of unbelief. And so the angel adduces a proof, not as a cure for unbelief, but in order to remove her astonishment.

**Reply to Objection 3.** As Ambrose says (Hexameron v): “For this reason had many barren women borne

children, that the virginal birth might be credible.”

The conception of the sterile Elizabeth is therefore adduced, not as a sufficient argument, but as a kind of figurative example.: consequently in support of this instance, the convincing argument is added taken from the Divine omnipotence.