

The Importance of the Annunciation

The meaning of this feast is well expressed in the hymns of vespers and orthros, such as this one sung at the aposticha of vespers.

Today is the joy of the annunciation, the triumph of virginity! Those below are united to those above! Adam is restored, and Eve is freed from her primal grief. The tabernacle of our nature, mingled with divinity, has become the temple of God! O the mystery! Incomprehensible is the image of His abasement, and ineffable the richness of His goodness! An angel serves the miracle, and the Virgin's womb receives the Son. The Holy Spirit is sent down from on high, and the Father is well pleased. The covenant is enacted by common consent. Saved thereby, let us cry out together with Gabriel to the Virgin: Rejoice, O joyous one, from whom Christ God, our salvation, is come, assuming our nature and elevating it in Himself! Entreat Him, that our souls be saved.



FOURTH SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT



THE LADDER OF DIVINE ASCENT

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Divine Liturgy: Sunday 10:00 AM
March 22, 2020

Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great

Antiphon (3rd)

1: Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth, sing praise to His name.

Through the prayers of the Mother of God, O Savior, save us!

2: Say to God: "How awesome are Your deeds! So great is Your power that Your enemies cringe before You."

Through the prayers of the Mother of God, O Savior, save us!

3: Let all the earth worship and sing praise to You; let it sing praise to Your name, O Most High!

Through the prayers of the Mother of God, O Savior, save us!

Entrance Hymn

Priest: Come, let us worship and bow down before Christ

People: O Son of God, who are risen from the dead, save us who sing to You, Alleluia!

Troparion of the Resurrection (Tone 8, Pg. 42)

You descended from on high, O Compassionate One; and consented to burial for three days, that You might free us from suffering. O Lord, our life and our resurrection, glory to You.

Troparion for St. John Climacus (Tone 8)

Your abundant tears made the wilderness sprout and bloom, and your deep sighings made your labor fruitful a hundredfold. You became a star shining over the world with miracles, holy father John. Pray to Christ God that He may save our souls.

Patronal Troparion (Tone 1, Pg. 15)

In giving birth, you have preserved your virginity, and in falling asleep, you did not forsake the world, O Mother of God. You have passed to life, being the Mother of Life. Through your intercession, save our souls from death.

Kondakion of the Annunciation (Tone 8)

We Your servants ascribe to you, O Mother of God, thank offerings of victory, O Champion Leader, for we have been liberated from terror but as you have that invincible power do you free us from every kind of danger so that we may cry out to you: Hail, O Bride ever-Virgin!

Hail, new Mother, workshop of the birth.

Hail, ineffable mother of a mystery beyond understanding;

Hail, new book of a new Scripture, of which, as Isaiah tells, angels and men are faithful witnesses;

Hail, alabaster jar of sanctifying ointment;

Hail, best trader of the coin of virginity;

Hail, creature embracing your Creator;

Hail, little container containing the Uncontainable (Homily 4:3).

Later poets would use the same literary device in composing Akathists to the Theotokos and, later, to numerous saints. It is also found in the Greek and Syriac hymns of Severus of Antioch (c. 459-538), Andrew of Crete (650-740), and John of Damascus (c. 675-749).

Appropriately enough, the same device is used in our services on the feast of the Annunciation. Several stichera at vespers are extended forms of the Mary-Gabriel dialogue in the Gospel, such as these:

"Gabriel stood before you, O Maiden, revealing the pre-eternal counsel, greeting you and exclaiming: 'Rejoice, O earth unsown! Rejoice, O bush unburnt! Rejoice, O depth hard to fathom! Rejoice, O bridge leading to the heavens and lofty ladder, which Jacob beheld! Rejoice, O divine jar of Manna! Rejoice, annulment of the curse! Rejoice, restoration of Adam: the Lord is with you!'"

"You appear to me as a man," the incorrupt Maiden said to the supreme commander; "yet how is it that you announce words which are beyond man? For you have said that God is with me, and that He will dwell in my womb. Tell me, how shall I become so spacious a dwelling and a place of sanctity which surpasses the cherubim? Deceive me no more with falsehood, for I have not known lust, I have not partaken of marriage, how then shall I give birth to a Child?"

The Angelic Salutation

The most popular prayer to the Theotokos based on Luke is undoubtedly the "Hail, Mary" which exists in different versions in the Greek, Latin and Syriac traditions. In each of these versions Gabriel's greeting (Lk 1:28) I is joined to Elizabeth's greeting when she was visited by Mary after the Annunciation (Lk 1:42).

In the Byzantine tradition the text is this: "Hail, O Theotokos, Mary full of grace, the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb, for you have given birth to the Savior of our souls." This troparion is sung at vespers every day during the Great Fast and at other times during the year. It is also used by many people as part of their daily rule of prayer.

The oldest version in the West is that of Pope Gregory the Great (590-604) who used the following text as the offertory chant on the Fourth Sunday in Advent: "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb." The second part of the prayer developed after the twelfth century and was fixed by Pope Pius V in 1568.

The only other tradition which uses this prayer is that of the Syriac Church which has a slightly different version in its book of the hours: "Hail Virgin Mary, full of grace, Our Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women and blessed is the Fruit of your womb, Our Lord. O Saint Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at all times, and at the hour of our death. Amen." It is often added to the concluding prayers of the daily office, particularly in India.

**IMAGE OF GOD—CROWNED WITH GLORY AND HONOR
52nd NATIONAL MELKITE CONVENTION
JULY 9 - 12, 2020
ATLANTA, GA**

St. John Chrysostom Melkite Catholic Church will host the 52nd National Melkite Convention at the Sheraton Atlanta Hotel. Go to their website, 2020melkite.org for more information.

LENTEN DINNER CANCELED

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, our annual Lenten Dinner has been cancelled. A letter is going out this week. If you have already sent in a donation and would like it returned, please call the rectory (**508-752-4174**) and we will gladly do so. If you would like us to keep your donation, it will get to the charities who need it. The current financial situation in Lebanon is challenging and any donations we can make to the charities will be much appreciated.

As you may know, we have cancelled all public services through the end of March. We will live stream Divine Liturgy on the parish's Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/olphmelkiteworcester>) at **10AM** tomorrow. The church will be open for private prayer from **11:30AM-1:00PM**. I will distribute Eucharist to those who wish to receive it. We cannot have more than 10 people in the church at any one time.

If you want to have me remember someone at the Divine Liturgy, please send me an email at olphmelkite@gmail.com. Tomorrow, we will remember our brother Charles "Bud" Welsh whose 40 memorial was originally scheduled for this day. Please remember in your prayers Bud, Ruth, and the entire family.

We will also live stream the Divine Liturgy of the feast of the Annunciation on Wednesday **March 25** at **6PM**.

Welcome to those who are visiting today. We are happy to have you worship with us. If this is your first time here, please come downstairs to the Hall, introduce yourself, have some refreshments, and get to know the Community. If you have any questions about the Melkite Church and its traditions, please don't hesitate to ask Fr. Bryan.

Weddings — One year notice. Contact Fr. Bryan for Sacramental Preparation.

Baptisms — One month notice. Contact Fr. Bryan for Sacramental Preparation.

Please let Fr. Bryan know about anyone who is sick, in the hospital, or homebound so that he can visit and bring them the Eucharist on a regular basis.

On the fourth Sunday of Great Lent we commemorate St. John Climacus or John of the Ladder, a 7th Century monk who lived at the Monastery of St. Catherine at the foot of Mt. Sinai. He gets his title "Climacus" from the Greek for "of the ladder." His most famous writing is *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*. This book describes the path to heaven as a ladder on which we climb. This ladder has thirty steps with titles such as "On Obedience", "On Penitence", and "On Remembrance of Death",. Each step gets us closer to Heaven. Each step is a little harder to reach than the one before it.

The Ladder was written for monastics, but it contains lessons, counsel, and cautions for all Christians.

Holy John Climacus, intercede for us!



“The Virgin’s Womb Receives the Son”

ST LUKE’S GOSPEL is the basis of the Great Feast of the Annunciation which our Church celebrates on March 25. In its first chapter this Scripture describes the appearance of the angel Gabriel – one of the few angels actually named in Scripture – to the Virgin Mary. For this story to be factual, its ultimate source could only be the Holy Virgin herself as there were no other eye-witnesses.

According to a tradition documented in the first centuries, “Luke, was born in Antioch, by profession, was a physician. He had become a disciple of the apostle Paul and later followed Paul until his [Paul’s] martyrdom” (from a second-century prologue to the Gospel). He was thought to be either a Hellenized Jew or a converted pagan writing in Greek for a Greek-speaking community. This explains the Greek expression used by the angel in the Annunciation narrative, a phrase which has become part of the prayer life of Christians all over the world: “Hail, full of grace.”

The Angel’s Greeting

In the Gospel the angel greets Mary with the Greek word *chaire* rather than with the Hebrew/Aramaic salutation, *shalom*. While each of these expressions has a different literal meaning, both are idiomatic forms of greeting, expressing good will between people. Some translations use the literal meaning, *Rejoice*, while others use the idiomatic meaning, *Hail*.

The angel describes Mary in Lk 1:28 as *kecharitomeni*, another word which has proven difficult to translate. When St Jerome rendered the Bible into Latin he translated this term literally as *gratia plena*, *full of grace*. This would create a problem centuries later when Western theology began using *gratia* as a technical term to mean the holiness bestowed by God. They interpreted Gabriel’s greeting as an indication that Mary was immaculately conceived.

During the Reformation many Protestants rejected both this doctrine and St Jerome’s translation, pointing to the angel Gabriel’s own explanation of the term in v. 30: “*Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor [charis] with God.*” Modern Catholic translations of Luke generally favor this interpretation as well, rendering *kecharitomeni* as “highly favored one.”

The Angel’s Greeting in Prayer

One effect of the Council of Ephesus (431), which affirmed the Virgin Mary as Theotokos, was an increase of devotion to her. St Theodotos of Ancyra, a Father of that council, left us a praise of Mary based on Gabriel’s greeting:

Hail, our desirable gladness;

Hail, O rejoicing of the churches;

Hail, O name that breathes out sweetness;

Hail, face that radiates divinity and grace;

Hail, most venerable memory;

Hail, O spiritual and saving fleece;

Hail, O Mother of unsetting splendor, filled with light;

Hail, unstained Mother of holiness;

Hail, most limpid font of the life-giving wave;

Prokimenon

Reader: The Lord will give strength to His people; the Lord will bless His people with peace.

People: The Lord will give strength to His people; the Lord will bless His people with peace.

Reader: Give to the Lord, you sons of God, give to the Lord glory and praise.

People: The Lord will give strength to His people; the Lord will bless His people with peace.

Reader: The Lord will give strength to His people

People: The Lord will bless His people with peace.

Epistle: Hebrews 6:13-20

Alleluia Verses

It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to Your name, O Most High!

Verse: To proclaim Your kindness at dawn and Your faithfulness throughout the night.

Gospel: Mark 9:16-30

Hirmos: In you, O full of grace...

SCHEDULE FOR PALM SUNDAY & HOLY WEEK (TENTATIVE)

Fri. 4/3-Vespers for Lazarus Saturday-7:00PM

Sun. 4/5-Palm Sunday. Divine Liturgy & Procession-10:00AM

Mon. 4/6-Bridegroom Service-7:00PM

Tues. 4/7-Bridegroom Service-7:00PM

Wed. 4/8-Anointing Service-7:00PM

Thu.4/9– Vesper Liturgy for Last Supper 10:00AM

Thu.4/9 - Crucifixion Service 7:00PM

Fri. 4/10–Vespers-Descent from the Cross –Noon

Fri.4/10-Lamentations-7:00PM

Sat.4/11-Hajmeh, Orthros, Divine Liturgy of Pascha-9:00PM

Sun. 4/12-Divine Liturgy of Pascha-10:00AM