



Feasts & Saints

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Sermon on the Annunciation

Saint Proklos, Patriarch of Constantinople

Our present gathering in honor of the Most Holy Virgin inspires me, brethren, to offer Her a word of praise, of benefit also for those who have come to this holy celebration. It is a praise of women, a glorification of their gender, which (glory) She brings to it, She Who is both Mother and Virgin at the same time.

O desired and wondrous gathering! O nature, celebrate that whereby honor is rendered to Woman; rejoice, O human race, that in which the Virgin is glorified. "But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (*Rom 5:20*). The Holy Mother of God and Virgin Mary has gathered us here. She is the pure treasure of virginity, the intended paradise of Second Adam, the place where the union of natures (divine and human) was accomplished, and the Counsel of salvific reconciliation was affirmed.

Who has ever seen, who has ever heard, that the Limitless God would dwell within a womb? He Whom the Heavens cannot circumscribe is not limited by the womb of a Virgin!

He Who is born of woman is not just God and He is not just Man. He Who is born has made woman, the ancient gateway of sin, the gateway of salvation. Where evil poured forth its poison, bringing on disobedience, there the Word made a living temple for Himself, bringing obedience there. From the place where the archsinner Cain sprang forth, there Christ the Redeemer of the human race was born without seed. The Lover of Mankind did not disdain to be born of woman, since She gave Him life (in His human nature). He was not subject to impurity by being in the womb which He Himself arrayed free from all harm. If this Mother had not remained a Virgin, then the Child born of Her might be a mere man, and the birth would not be miraculous in any way. Since She remained a Virgin after giving birth, then how is He Who is born not God? It is an inexplicable mystery, for He Who passed through locked doors without hindrance was born in an inexplicable manner. Thomas cried out, "My Lord, and my God!" (*Jn 20:28*), thus confessing the union of two natures in Him.

The Apostle Paul says that Christ is "to the Jews a stumblingblock, and to the Greeks foolishness" (*1 Cor 1:23*): they did not perceive the power of the mystery, since it was incomprehensible to their minds: "for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory" (*1 Cor 2:8*). If the Word had not settled within the womb, then the flesh would not have ascended onto the Divine Throne with Him. If it were disdainful for God to enter the womb which He created, then the angels also would have disdained service to mankind.

He, Who in His (divine) nature was not subject to sufferings, through His love for us subjected Himself to many sufferings. We believe that Christ was not made God by some gradual ascent toward the divine nature, but being God, He was made Man through His mercy. We do not say, "a man was made God," but we confess that God was incarnate and made Man.

He Who, in His essence did not have a mother chose His servant as Mother; and He Who appeared on earth in the image of man, does not have an earthly father. How is He both without a father, and without a mother, according to the words of the Apostle (*Heb 7:3*)? If He is only a man, then He cannot be without a mother, but actually He had a Mother. If He is only God, then He cannot be without a Father, but He has the Father. Yet as God the Creator, He has no mother, and as Man, He has no father.

We can be persuaded of this by the very name of the Archangel who spoke to Mary: his name is Gabriel. What does this name mean? It means "man of God." Since He Whom Gabriel announced is God and Man, then his very name points to this miracle beforehand, so that this act of Divine dispensation is accepted with faith.

It would be impossible for a mere man to save people, for every man has need of the Savior: "for



all have sinned," says St. Paul, "and come short of the Glory of God" (*Rom 3:23*). Since sin subjects the sinner to the power of the devil, and the devil subjects him to death, then our condition became extremely desparate: there was no way to be delivered from death. Physicians were sent, i.e. the prophets, but they could only point out the malady more clearly. What did they do? When they saw that the illness was beyond human skill, they summoned the Physician from Heaven. One of them said, "Lord, bow Thy heavens, and come down" (*Ps 143/144:5*); others cried out, "Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed" (*Jer 17:14*); "Turn us, O God, and cause Thy face to shine; and we shall be delivered" (*Ps 79/80:3*).

Still others said, "But will God truly dwell with man upon the earth?" (*3/1 Kgs 8:27*); "let Thy tender mercies go before us, O Lord, for we are greatly impoverished" (*Ps 78/79:8*). Others said, "Alas, my soul! For the godly have perished from the earth; and there is none among men who orders his way aright" (*Mich 7:2*). "Draw near, O God, to my help" (*Ps 69/70:1*). "Though He should tarry, wait for Him; for He will surely come, and will not tarry" (*Hab 2:3*). "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Thy servant; for I have not forgotten Thy commandments" (*Ps 118/119:176*). "God our God will come manifestly, and shall not keep silence" (*Ps. 49/50:3*).

He, Who by nature is Lord, did not disdain human nature enslaved by the sinister power of the devil. The merciful God would not allow it to be under the power of the devil forever, the Ever-Existing One came and gave His Blood in ransom. To redeem the race of man from death He gave up His Body, which He had accepted from the Virgin. He delivered the world from the curse of the law, annihilating death by His death. "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law," says St. Paul (*Gal 3:13*).

Know then that our Redeemer is not simply a mere man, since the whole human race was enslaved to sin. But neither is He just God, Who does not partake of human nature. He had a body, for if He had not clothed Himself in me, then neither would He have saved me. But, having settled in the womb of the Virgin, He clothed Himself in my fate, and within this womb He effected a miraculous change: He bestowed the Spirit and received a body.

And so, Who is made manifest to us? The Prophet David shows you by these words: "Blessed is He that comes in the Name of the Lord" (*Ps 117/118:26*). But tell us even more clearly, O prophet, Who is He? The Lord is the God of Hosts, says the prophet: "God is the Lord, and has revealed Himself unto us" (*Ps 117/118:27*). "The Word was made flesh" (*Jn 1:14*): there the two natures were united, and the union remained without mingling.

He came to save, but had also to suffer. What has the one in common with the other? A mere man cannot save; and God cannot suffer in His nature. By what means was the one and the other done? He, Emmanuel, being God, was made also Man. He saved by that which He was (God), and He suffered as that which He became (Man).

Therefore, when the Church saw that the Jewish throng had crowned Him with thorns, bewailing the violence of the throng, it said: "Go forth, ye daughters of Zion, and behold King Solomon, and the crown with which he is crowned by His mother" (*Song 3:11*). He wore the crown of thorns and destroyed the judgement of suffering from the thorns.

He alone is both in the bosom of the Father and in the womb of the Virgin; He alone is in the arms of His Mother and rides on the wings of the winds (*Ps. 103/104:3*). He, before Whom the angels bow down in worship, also reclined at table with publicans. The Seraphim dared not gaze upon Him, yet Pilate pronounced sentence upon Him. He Who the servant smote is also the one before Whom all creation trembles. He was nailed to the Cross, and ascended to the Throne of Glory. He was placed in the tomb, and He stretched out the heavens like a curtain (*Ps. 103/104:2*). He was numbered among the dead, and He emptied Hell. Here on earth, they cursed Him as a transgressor; there in Heaven, they glorified Him as the All-Holy.

What an incomprehensible mystery! I see the miracles, and I confess that He is God. I see the sufferings, and I cannot deny that He is Man. Emmanuel opened the doors of nature as man, and as God He preserved the seal of virginity intact. He emerged from the womb at birth the same way He entered through the Annunciation. Wondrously was He both conceived and born: He entered without passion, and He emerged without impairment.

As the Prophet Ezekiel says concerning this: "He brought me back by the way of the outer gate of the sanctuary that looks eastward: and it was shut. And the Lord said to me: This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no one shall pass through it; for the Lord God of Israel shall enter by it, and it shall be shut" (*Ez 44:1-2*). Here the Holy Virgin and Mother of God is clearly indicated. Let all contention cease, and let the Holy Scripture enlighten our reason, so that we too may receive the Heavenly Kingdom unto all eternity. **Amen.**

