

## THE ANNUNCIATION

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*Lessons: Luke 1:26-56*

For years and years, way back in the earliest times, women wished to become the mother of the Lord. From ancient times mothers hoped and prayed that they would be chosen for this great use to all mankind. They wanted - without really knowing how very important the day would be - to play a part in the Christmas story. From ancient times, stretching all the way back to Adam and Eve, it was known that a most important baby would be born into the world, who would grow up to fight and be victorious over man's spiritual enemies. The Lord God had told Adam a Son would be born - the "seed" of the woman and He would bruise the "head" of the serpent, that is, would bring the hells, which had led men away from heaven, into order, and in this way save men from the power of evil.

Men knew this great event would happen one day. They did not know how it would take place, when it would take place, nor where. For this reason, when the angel Gabriel told Mary that she had been chosen, she was surprised and filled with wonder. Imagine what it must have been like to suddenly see an angel and be told such great news. Have you ever been told that something you secretly had longed and hoped for was really about to happen? If you have, you can appreciate how Mary must have felt, although what was to happen to her was the most important event to ever happen on any earth.

At first Mary was so surprised and filled with awe at the sight of the angel that she was not sure of the meaning of his words. Then gradually, as he went on, she understood and accepted with humility.

"Rejoice, highly favored one...Blessed are you among women" (Luke 1:28). From this greeting, Mary would know something very special was going to happen to her, since to be "favored" means to be chosen - chosen of all the women, not only from her times, but throughout the ages. To be "blessed" means to receive something holy from heaven. Mary was to serve a special use as mother of the baby Lord, and we all receive blessing and delight when we perform uses.

As the angel went on, Mary began to know the full meaning of his visit, and when he said she would "conceive... and bring forth a Son... [Whose name was to be] Jesus [or Savior]" (Luke 1:31), then, she must have remembered the many ancient prophecies of the Messiah to come, and she must have realized that something very, very precious would begin in her womb and would grow to be born—the "Holy" Child.

Most babies are given their names after they are born. First of all, we don't know if they'll be a boy or a girl, and we like to give them their names when they are baptized. But, our real names, the names we will have in heaven, are only given to us when our character is formed. For in heaven our name means our character or spiritual use. But Mary could be given the name to name her baby ahead of time because His Soul was His use. For He was of the Holy Spirit the Spirit of God coming down to teach truth and do good for all mankind. The name of this child meant what He was to be and what He was going to do. It foretold the use He would perform for the whole human race. For He was to become "Jesus", *The Savior*.

If we are to understand the surprise and wonder Mary felt, we must remember that no one since creation had ever been born in so wonderful a manner. Mary knew this, so she asked, "How can this be? [How is this possible, when I am not yet married?]" (Luke 1:34). And the angel told her how this baby's soul would come directly from the "Holy Spirit", from the "power of the Highest", and that therefore this child would be "the Son of God...For with God nothing is impossible" (Luke 1:35,37). Now that she knew—now that the full meaning of what was to happen had been revealed—Mary could only say, yes. Her full-hearted willingness to cooperate, to humbly give her life to serve this great use, is expressed by her words: "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38).

But Mary could not long hold her newfound joy to herself. She went to visit her cousin Elizabeth, who also was to have a child—John the Baptist, but before Mary could tell her great news, Elizabeth greeted her saying, "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb. But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Luke 1:43).

It was then that Mary burst forth in song—the first Christmas song, which we call the "Magnificat"—singing "My soul magnifies the Lord | And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior [Jesus]. | For He has regarded the low estate of His maidservant; | For behold, henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. | For He who is mighty has done to me great things; | And holy is His name" (Luke 1:46-49).

Joseph also was visited by the angel of the Lord. He was told to take Mary to be his wife and that the child she was expecting was conceived of the "Holy Spirit". He too was told to "call His name Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins... [and] Joseph being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him, and took to him his wife, and did not know her not till she had brought forth her first-born son. And he called His name JESUS (Matthew 1:18-25).

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It is interesting that Swedenborg met Mary, the mother of the Lord, in heaven and this is what we are told: "Once it was granted me to speak with Mary the mother. On a certain occasion she passed by and appeared in heaven above my head In (beautiful) white raiment like silk; and then pausing a little she said that she *had been* the mother of the Lord, who was born of her; but that He, having become God, had put off everything human that He had derived from her, and that she therefore worshiped Him as her God, and was unwilling that any one should acknowledge Him as her son, because in Him all is Divine"(*True Christian Religion* 102-3).