

The Feast of the Annunciation March 25, 2020.

The Gospel of Luke, Chapter 1, verses 26-38.

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.' But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.' Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her.

Today the church keeps the Feast of the Annunciation, the day which celebrates the Angel of the Lord coming to Mary to tell her of the impending birth of Jesus, the Son of God.

Today is the day the Sisters of the Incarnation celebrate their dedication festival, with worship and passion fruit sponge cake. (All this will happen, but in social isolation this year.)

The gospel account of the angel coming to Mary speaks right to our hearts this year as we find ourselves in the midst of this pandemic. It is probably the worst thing to happen so immediately to us in Australia and indeed the whole world. And most of us, not surprisingly, are afraid if not for ourselves, then for our families and dear friends. We are confused. We have not much idea where this pandemic will take us and what it is going to do to our lives.

When the Gabriel announced that Mary would conceive and bear a child, the Son of the Most High, she too was afraid, definitely confused. This was undoubtedly the worst thing that had happened to her in her young life.

The Sisters of the Incarnation keep this day as our festival (though we are dedicated to the Incarnation at Christmas) because this event points to the Incarnation, God coming to be at one with us in this turbulent world.



Mary was full of questions. How can this be she asks the angel. And I bet she was full of “what now of my life, what on earth will happen to me in this predicament which will make me an outcast my betrothed and my village.” We are full of questions too ... questions about where is this all going to end for me, for my family for Australia, our world. And of course, the big question, and where is God in all of this.

We are exhorted to pray. And we do, but still the virus spreads exponentially among us. Those who pray, whatever their faith, may be, are not immune from its tentacles. So maybe we pray like Lara Bingle, “Where the bloody hell are you?”

Gabriel says to Mary, “don’t be afraid. You have found favour with God.” Isaiah says in Chapter 43 “Do not be afraid – I have redeemed you. I have called you by name – you are mine ... because you are precious in my sight, and honoured, and I love you.”

So God says to us, I have called you by your name, you are precious and I love you.

Does that mean that all is going to OK for all of us Christians? I wish I could say Yes. But I can’t. It didn’t go well always for Mary, though she was Mother of the Son of God. It didn’t go well for Jesus himself ...

But there is incarnation, God is with us, whatever happens. And though Jesus life ends in his crucifixion, we also know there is resurrection, new life for all of us.

The Annunciation, pointing to the Incarnation, tells us “Don’t be afraid, God is in the midst of all this turmoil, calling us by name because he loves us.”

God who made us all:

Our healers are exhausted, God.

Give rest to those who care for the sick.

Our Children are bored, God.

Grant extra creativity to their caregivers.

Our friends are lonely, God.

Help us to reach out

Our pastors are doing the best they can, God.

Help them to know it is enough.

Our workers are jobless, God.

Grant us the collective will to take care of them.

Our fellow parents are losing their minds, God.

Bring unexpected plan and joy in dance parties to all in need.

Our grocery workers are absorbing everyone’s anxiety, God.

Protect them from us.

Our elderly are even more isolated, God.

Comfort them.

We haven’t done this before and we are scared, God.

I don’t even know what else to pray for. Amen.

You may wish to play this music from the Iona Community:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LoYKTFe9dVw>

“Don’t be afraid, my love is stronger, and I have promised always to be near.”

You will all be with us in spirit as we celebrate the Annunciation at the eucharist in our chapel.

Love and prayers from Juliana. A Sister of the Incarnation.

