

Pope Shenouda III series

5

***THE FEAST
OF
THE ANNUNCIATION***

***BY HIS HOLINESS AMBA SHENOUDA III,
POPE AND PATRIARCH OF ALEXANDRIA
AND OF THE APOSTOLIC SEE OF
ALL THE PREDICATION OF SAINT MARK***

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Predication of the Evangelist St. Mark*

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*In the Name of
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
the One God,
Amen.*

You will read in this pamphlet about the Annunciation of the Nativity of Christ, glory be to Him, and the annunciations which preceded and succeeded it. It is the annunciation of salvation for the world. It is the first feast of the Lord. It is an annunciation of love, because the reason of the Incarnation and Redemption is the love of God for the world. The Lord Christ has offered to us rejoicing annunciations and has presented God to us as a loving Father.

What shall we then announce to people? Let there be in your mouths, all of you, a rejoicing annunciation for everybody.

Pope Shenouda III

The feast of the Annunciation comes every year on the 29th of Baramhat. There is between it and the Feast of the Nativity which comes on the 29th of Kiahk, a period of nine months that constitutes the period of the holy pregnancy with the Lord Christ.

The Annunciation

Thus the feast of the Annunciation is the first among the Lord feasts.

We remember in it the Annunciation of the archangel Gabriel to the Holy Virgin saying to her:

"Hail to you, you full of grace, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women! And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest, and the Lord God will give Him the throne of his father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1: 26-33).

When the Virgin was astonished saying: "How can this be, since I do not know a man?", the angel replied: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1: 34-35).

The angel announced to her about the conception of Elisabeth while she was an old woman. Then he said: "For with God nothing will be impossible" (Luke 1:37).

The Virgin received this annunciation, or this assignment, with submission to the divine will and said: "Behold the maid-servant of the Lord! Let it be according to your word. And the angel departed from her" (Luke 1: 38-39)..... having accomplished his mission.

Other annunciations

There were other annunciations before and after The Annunciation:

There was before it, the annunciation of the angel to the priest Zacharias with the birth of his son John the Baptist.

That one who will be the angel who prepares the way before the Lord Christ (Mark 1:2); and about whom there was the prophecy of the prophet Malachi (Mal. 3:1).

The angel of the Lord "appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense", and announced to him saying:

"...and your wife Elisabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will

rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah....."(Luke 1:8:17).

The Annunciation of the angel to the Virgin was followed by another annunciation to Joseph the Carpenter.

"an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying: "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to yo Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:20-21). And he reminded him of the prophecy of the prophet Isaiah: "Behold the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14).

When the Lord Christ was born, another annunciation was sent to the shepherds and to all the people:

An angel of the Lord appeared to "shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night..... and the glory of the Lord shone around them Then the angel said to them: "I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men" (Luke 2: 8-14).

The Annunciation is joy

An annunciation always brings rejoicing news.

Therefore the Gospel is called "besharah" (in Arabic, meaning annunciation). We say "the besharah" of Matthew, the "besharah" of Mark.... because the Gospel brings rejoicing news, Good News, news about the Salvation which the Lord Christ offered in view of our Redemption; and also because the Gospel brings us rejoicing news about the beautiful instructions of Christ, that rejoices every heart who loves virtue and holiness; since spiritual people rejoice with the word of God as if they have found great riches (Ps. 119).

The feast of the Annunciation brings an annunciation of Salvation.

That is clear from the words of the angel: "and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). The word "Jesus" means saviour.

Therefore also, the angel said to the shepherds: "For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11).

The Holy Virgin sang in her encounter with saint Elisabeth, with this song saying: "And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour" (Luke 1:47).

This Annunciation of Salvation was neither only for the Saint Virgin, nor only for the shepherds, but for all the world.

Therefore the angel said to the shepherds: "I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2: 10-11).

It is about this salvation which is for all, that the old man Simeon, when he took the child Jesus up in his arms, blessed God and said: "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples" (Luke 2:29-31).

The good news of salvation is then for everybody and for all peoples. It arrived first to the ears of our mother the Holy Virgin Mary, then to the others.

The beginning of reconciliation

The annunciation of the birth of the Lord Christ was the beginning of the reconciliation between heaven and earth:

The beginning of the reconciliation between God and men, after a long dissension since Adam and Eve..... The way to the tree of life was closed, and was guarded by the cherubim with a flaming sword (Gen. 3:24). The Holiest of All was behind the veil, and nobody from the people could enter it (Heb. 9: 3,7).

In the previous period to the coming of the Lord Christ, there were neither prophets, nor talking between God and men, nor holy visions, nor angels whom God sent to men..... It was a long period during which human beings were alienated from God.

Then came the Annunciation as a prelude of reconciliation between God and men.

The visions of angels multiplied, accompanied by rejoicing epistles that were the Annunciation of the Saviour.....

It was an annunciation of a spiritual salvation.

An annunciation of a Saviour who will save men from their sins, and not a political saviour who would save from the dominion of Romans.

It was rather a salvation "by the remission of their sins" (Luke 1:77). As the priest Zacharias prophesied saying about this salvation "Through the tender mercy of our God to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death" (Luke 1: 78:79).

Salvation was to be completed upon the Cross, when Christ carried our sins and died for them. But the salvation upon the Cross would not

have been completed unless if first Christ were born. Here was the importance of the Annunciation of the Nativity of Christ who will deliver his people from their sins, and the annunciation of the salvation from the dominion of Satan, and the annunciation of the salvation from the judgement of death, and from the dissension which was between God and men.....

The road to salvation then, began with the Annunciation.

The old man Simeon saw it in the Nativity of Christ, and said to the Lord: "For my eyes have seen Your Salvation" (Luke 2:30); that is the procession of the salvation, and the procession of the journey from the Nativity to Golgotha. He saw them with the spirit of prophecy.....

An annunciation brought by angels

It was the archangel Gabriel who has brought the Annunciation to the Holy Virgin, in view of the dignity of the Saint Mother of God. The annunciation to Joseph the Carpenter, was in a dream where the angel of God appeared to him and brought him the good news. The annunciation of the birth of John the Baptist was on the right side of the altar of incense, as it is becoming to Zacharias the priest.....

The annunciation to Joseph was after the holy conception. But the annunciation to the Holy Virgin was before that. Why then?

It was not convenient that the Virgin would find herself pregnant, without her knowledge of anything about the matter, lest she would fall into a great terror that would also affect her blood and her morale! But the convenient matter was rather that she would first know the divine mystery, and be psychologically prepared in a restful manner.... and also it was necessary that she would be annunciated firstly, in order that she would give her acceptance to offer herself as a mother in the mystery of the divine Incarnation. God did not compel her to that.

When the Virgin responded to the divine will with the expression: "Let it be to me according to your word", then began the holy pregnancy.

But it was not convenient that Joseph the Carpenter would have been annunciated before the Virgin, and before taking her acceptance, and also because of the importance of the Holy Virgin.

Let it be to me according to your word

In the story of the Annunciation, we remember two things: the divine choice, and the human response.

The choice by God of the Virgin, and her response with her words: "Let it be to me according to your word".....

The reason of the choice by God, is His knowledge of the holiness of the Virgin, and her tolerance of this magnificent glory: the Virgin who was bred up in the temple since her childhood, in the life of prayer and

meditation, and in her reading of the Holy Bible, and her study of many of the versets, the pure Virgin who loved virginity.

And also the humble Virgin who can bear that magnificent glory without her heart being raised up.

It would not be not an easy matter for a girl to become the mother of God, if she was not very humble-hearted. Bearing dignity is not an easy matter, as saint Abba Antonius said: "Bearing dignity is more difficult than bearing outrage". But a humble heart can bear dignity. Therefore God waited till He found that humble pure heart, in order to annunciate to her with the divine Incarnation.

The Holy Virgin said thus in her song: "my soul has rejoiced in God my Saviour, for He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant" (Luke 1: 47-48). The expression "maidservant" and not "mother", is also a proof of her humility, specially after she had heard saint Elisabeth say to her: "But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Luke 1:43).

The will of God united with the will of the Virgin, by the expression: "let it be to me according to your word". And the holy pregnancy began by this expression.

Thus the Holy Spirit came upon her, and sanctified her womb, so that the Holy One that is born of her, would not inherit anything from the original sin.

By the expression: "let it be to me according to your word", the Logos or the Second Person came into the Holy Virgin's womb, and united personally to a body whom the Holy Spirit made in her, in order to grow with a natural growth until His birth is completed.

In this manner, the humble Word, "who made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant" (Philippians 2:7), came into the womb of the humble Virgin.

It was becoming of the humble Son, to be borne of a humble mother.

Because without humility, the completion of the divine Incarnation was not possible. And without humility, Crucifixion and Redemption could not have been possible.

There is another important lesson which we take from the expression: "let it be to me according to your word":

With the expression: "let it be to me according to your word", the Virgin proved the life of abandon:

The Holy Virgin who had loved the life of virginity, since she did "not know a man", (Luke 1:34), did not at anytime think that she would become a mother, and that was something wonderful in her eyes. But when the angel annunciated to her the divine will, she could not but abandon herself to the will of God, and she said: "let it be to me according to your word".

Thus in the feast of the Annunciation, we learn a lesson about the life of abandon.

In the story of the Annunciation, we see the awe of the angel of God.

The expression: "do not be afraid" is evidently apparent.

It was said in the annunciation of the angel to the priest Zacharias: "And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elisabeth will bear you a son" (Luke 1: 12-13).

And in the annunciation of the angel to the Virgin, it was said: "But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. Then the angel said to her: "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God" (Luke 1: 29-30).

In the story of the Annunciation also, we see the respect of the archangel Mikhail for the Holy Virgin.

When he appeared to her, he said: "Hail to you, O full of grace, the Lord is with you, blessed are you among women" (Luke 1:28).

This encounter is different from the apparition of the angel to the priest Zacharias, and the apparition of the angel to Joseph in a dream. In the two apparitions, there were no salutation, and no praise, as in the apparition to the Virgin.

We remark that the expression: "blessed are you among women" which the angel said to the Virgin, was told to her also by saint Elisabeth in her encounter with her (Luke 1:42).

We note that the astonishment of Zacharias from having a son, was met by the angel Gabriel with a punishment (Luke 1:20), while the astonishment of the Virgin, was met by an explanation and a clarification.

It is on the one side, because of the dignity of the Virgin, and also because the virginal birth was the first of its kind and had no precedent. But the birth from sterile women and from the wives of old men, happened before, as in the birth of Isaac from the old Abraham and his wife Sara (Gen. 18:11-12). When Sara was astonished to give birth in her old age, the Lord did not punish her, because there was no precedent to this in that time.

Anyway, the angel replied saying: "For with God nothing will be impossible" (Luke 1:37). May we also take a lesson from this expression of the angel, a lesson that will bring hope in our hearts, whatever matters seem difficult or impossible before us!..... The Lord Christ also said this spiritual and theological principle later on: "With men it is impossible; but not with God; for with God all things are possible" (Mark 10:27).

In the story of the Annunciation, we rejoice that it was an angel who brought the Annunciation.

The prophet Elisha brought the annunciation to the shunamite woman that she will have a son, saying: "About this time next year you will embrace a son" (2 Kings 4:16). And this happened. But here, it is an angel who brings the annunciation, rather an archangel, because of the majesty of the born

The angel said to the Virgin about her son: "He will be great" (Luke 1:32).

He said also: "and will be called the Son of the Highest" (Luke 1:32). He also said to her: "that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). He said this before Nataniel testified this sonship (John 1:49), and before Peter (Matt. 16:16).

The angel in his annunciation to the Virgin, testified that her Son will be a King, "and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:33). That resembles also the prophecy of the prophet Daniel, when he said: "Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed" (Dan. 7:14).

The feast of the Annunciation gives us an idea about feasts during the period of fasting.

It comes always during Lent, because the month of Baramhat is always during Lent. We do not break Lent for any reason. Therefore we celebrate the feast of the Annunciation while we are fasting our vegetal fast, although we are exempted from fasting without any food or drink, in celebration of this feast of the Lord. Also there are no "metanoyas" (that means kneeling down and touching the ground with one's forehead).

The Annunciation of Salvation

It is the feast not simply of the Annunciation of the Nativity, but the Annunciation of the beginning of salvation.

We bring the good news to people that God had begun the execution of His divine plan for the salvation of the human race; beginning with the operation of the Incarnation by the holy pregnancy, which leads to Nativity, and then to the Cross, and the Redemption, then the Resurrection and the destruction of the judgement of death.

In the feast of the Annunciation, we bring the good news to everybody, that his salvation is near, and that God has decreed to save.

As He said when He granted salvation to the chief tax collector Zaccheus: "Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham; for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19: 9-10). He who saved the tax collector Zaccheus in spite of all his iniquities, He is able to save any sinner. And

He who came to save those who have perished, He also is ready to save those who have fallen.....

How beautiful is it that we present the annunciation of salvation to every one who is under a yoke.

We say to those who are tired and under heavy charges, here is the Lord who says: "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28).

And we say to those have broken hearts: The Lord has come for you and for your rest and for your delivery. Is He not the One who said: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound" (Isaiah 61:1). With this, we plant hope and joy in the hearts of people. Verily how true is the word of the Bible:

"How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!" (Rom. 10:15).

The Bible says also: "a good report makes the bones healthy" (Prov. 15:30).

Let then be in your mouths a good word that rejoices people, and good news that fills their hearts with hope..... Say to the sinner that repentance is easy, and that the grace of God is capable of facilitating for you the way of repentance; and God looks for you, and He will inevitably find you and bring you back to Him. Therefore your salvation from sin is possible and easy. And as the apostle saint Paul said: "now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed" (Rom. 13:11). The Lord is ready to accept us to Him whatever we have gone astray far from Him, as He previously accepted the lost son (Luke 15), and as He accepted the apostle Peter (John 21) although he had precedently denied Him, and swore and cursed and said: "I do not know the Man" (Matt. 26:74).

Rejoicing declarations by the Lord Christ

How numerous are the rejoicing declarations which the Lord God presented to individuals or to the whole world. Among them:

A rejoicing declaration in the expression: "your sins are forgiven you".

He said this expression to the paralytic whom his friends had let down on a bed from the uncovered roof (Mark 2:5). All what this paralytic hoped for was to obtain the healing of his body. But the Lord granted him also the annunciation of forgiving his sins..... The Lord said the same expression to the woman sinner who had anointed His feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair in the house of Simeon the leper. He annunciated to her also the forgiveness of her sins, because she had loved

much, and He said to her: "your sins are forgiven you" (Luke 7:48). And also: "Your faith has saved you" (Luke 7:50).

The most beautiful annunciations are the proclamations of forgiveness, and they are many in the mouth of the Lord Christ.

Even when He was upon the Cross, He said this declaration: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34). He brought the same beautiful annunciation to the right thief, comforting him by his word: "today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). It is the most beautiful expression which the thief heard during all his life, and he heard it on the last day of his life.

How beautiful also is the word of the Lord to the woman who was caught in the very act: "Neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more" (John 8:11).

The apostle Peter was very sad because he had denied the Lord three times. "So he went out and wept bitterly" (Matt. 26:75). Then after the Resurrection, he heard from the Lord this rejoicing annunciation: "Feed my lambs tend my sheep" (John 21: 15-16).

Truthfully, an annunciation will bring more joy if it is not expected, or if it is more generously announced.

Before the crucifixion, the Lord presented many rejoicing annunciations to his disciples.

He said to them: "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you" (John 14:18), "Therefore you now have sorrow, but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you" (John 16:22). He announced to them that He will rise from death and that they will see Him; and He announced to them another beautiful annunciation which is: "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14: 2-3). What is more beautiful than this annunciation.

He made to them another annunciation about the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them.

The annunciation of the Holy Spirit

by rejoicing words saying: "And I will pray the Father; and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever, the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you" (John 14:16-17). And also: "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you" (John 14:26), "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth, and He will tell you things to come" (John 13:16).

The talk about the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them, was a rejoicing annunciation, revealing the power which they will obtain, and revealing the beginning of their service and their predication. Therefore He said to them before the Ascension: "you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

May we, all of us, announce to people the action of the Holy Spirit in them.

We announce to them the participation of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 13-14); and that they will all be, the "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). Obviously partakers in the action, the Holy Spirit acting in us, and acting by us and with us. As the apostle saint Paul said about himself and about Apollos, his associate in the service: "For we are God's fellow workers" (1 Cor. 3:9). And as we pray in the prayer of the travellers, saying to God: "Participate in the work with your servants, in every good deed"

Yes, we announce to people that they have become the temples of the Holy Spirit.

That would be after they had obtained the holy anointment in the holy sacrament of Confirmation (1 John 2: 20,27), and the Holy Spirit has taken His abode in them. Thus would be realised the annunciation which the apostle saint Paul said to us: "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Cor. 3:16), "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?" (1 Cor. 6:19).

Other annunciations

Among the deepest and the most influential annunciations, there is the word of the Lord:

"and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age"
(***Matt. 28:20***).

It is a good and rejoicing annunciation that the Lord will be always with us, and that we are not alone. He says rather: "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20). Also his word: "Peace I leave to you, My peace I give to you Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27).

Let us not forget also the annunciation of the divine protection:

He says: "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered" (Matt. 10:30)., and his word: "But not a hair of your head shall be lost" (Luke 21:18). The apostle saint Paul remembered this annunciation and

said to his men announcing them and saying: "since not a hair will fall from the head of any of you" (Acts 27 34).

About this guard also, the Gospel presented to us another annunciation in the word of the Lord God: "Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you" (Luke 10:19). And his word to the apostle saint Paul: "Do not be afraid for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you" (Acts 18: 9-10).

An annunciation concerning eternity

How wonderful are the annunciations which the Lord presents about the happy eternity. The Lord presents them to the triumphant, those who have fought in their spiritual life and were victorious.

He says:

"To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God"

"He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death"

"To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat"

"And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations"

"and I will give him the morning star"

(Apocalypse, Revelation 2: 7,11,17,26,28).

And He completes this rejoicing annunciation saying:

"He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life, but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels".

"He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God."

Rather how wonderful is the annunciation in which He says:

"To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with my Father on His throne".

(Apocalypse, Revelation 3: 5,12,21).

The Lord presents to us another annunciation about eternity in the description of the heavenly Jerusalem

where God will abide with His people in this city "coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for his husband"..... "there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" (Apoc. 21:2-4).

"The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it" (Apoc. 21:23).

"There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever" (Apoc. 22:5).

"They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads" (Apoc. 22:4).

There will be the tree of life, and the water of life.

There is the annunciation of the frequentation of the angels and of the saints. From the best which has been said about the annunciation of eternity, there is the word of the apostle:

"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Cor. 2:9).

A marvelous annunciation about life in eternity. It exceeds all imagination, and brings joy, and incites to spiritual exertion, and to join the Lord in order to enjoy this annunciation. The apostle adds another annunciation to it, where he says that we shall rise with spiritual bodies, heavenly bodies. We shall be risen in power and in glory. "For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality" (1 Cor. 15:53).

The apostle adds another annunciation, and says: "Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thess. 4: 17-18).

Truthfully, how sweet and beautiful is it to meditate upon this annunciation concerning eternity.....

An annunciation concerning God

In Christianity, there are many beautiful, deep and moving matters which we can annunciate to people. But the most beautiful in them, is God Himself and His relationship with human beings.

God loves human beings. He is The benefactor and controls everything. He is "fairer than the sons of men" (Ps. 45:2). He has beautifully done everything. In His love for us, He has created us to His image and His resemblance, and granted us power over all His creatures on earth (Gen. 1: 26-28). When we sinned against Him, because of the excellence of His love to us, He redeemed us and facilitated for us the way of repentance. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

The annunciation of forgiveness and redemption is among the most beautiful matters which Christianity annunciates.

God of whom the psalmist said: "He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the

heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust" (Psalm 103: 10-14).

He is the merciful forgiving good God

who says in spite of our disobeying his commandments: "For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more" (Jer. 31:34); "Do I have pleasure at all that the wicked should die?.....and not that he should turn from his ways and live?!" "None of the transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him; because of the righteousness which he has done, he shall live." (Ez. 18: 23-22). He is God who has reconciled the world to Himself "not imputing their trespasses to them" (2 Cor. 5:19).

When the prophet David meditated upon the beautiful qualities of God, he said in his psalm:

***"O Lord God of hosts, who is mighty like You, O Lord? (Ps 89:8),
"O God, who is like You? (Ps. 71:19).***

"who in the heavens can be compared to the Lord?" (Ps. 89:6). "Among the gods there is none like You, O Lord" (Ps. 86:8), "For the Lord is great and greatly to be praised; He is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are idols" (Ps. 96:4-5).

God gives us without our asking, and gives us more than we ask for. He gives food to the birds of the sky, He gives beauty to the lilies of the field which Solomon in all his glory had not (Matt. 6: 26-29).

Let us announce to people that God is the Shepherd who carries us joyfully upon his shoulders (Luke 15:5).

He is the shepherd about whom the prophet David said: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake" (Psalm 23). He is also the good shepherd who "gives His life for the sheep" (John 10:11)..... Yes, He is the good shepherd who searches for us when we go astray, and does not rest till He finds us. (Luke 15).

We announce to people that God is God the Safekeeper, the Deliverer, the Rescuer.....

He is the One who will not forget us, even if the mother forgets her nursing child (Is. 49:15). He has said: "I will not leave you, nor forsake you" (Joshua 1:5). He cares for us whatever we go astray. He is the God of all, even the weak, the small, the despised, and that are not (1 Cor. 1:28). He is the One sitting in the high places, looking at humble people. He is the One who forgives our sins, and delivers our life from corruption; as we say in the divine mass. He is the One to whom we say

in the Lord Prayer: "do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one" (Matt. 6:13).

An annunciation of love

Let a rejoicing word be in the mouths of everyone of you, to say it to people, let everyone of you bring to them a good annunciation.

Carry a good word to every one who is in tribulation or who has a problem; a word of good wishes, or a word of profitable counsel. Say to everybody that there is a key to every closed door, there are, may be, rather many keys and that God has a solution to every problem, rather many solutions. Say if God wills, that problem will be solved. If God wills, that tribulation will end. Remind people with the word of the Bible:

"all things work together for good to those who love God"
(Rom. 28:8).

Let not your features be morose, do not give people a frightening thought about God, a black thought about religion which you do not mention unless accompanied with weeping and tears! so that all those who see you say: "O Lord, cover"! and see nothing but a band on which it is written: "by a sad countenance the heart is made better" (Eccl. 7:3)..... The sad countenance will be while you are giving account to yourself about your sins in your sleeping place, and not constantly before people!

Let cheerfulness be one of your beloved qualities that draws people to religion.

Your cheerfulness is a rejoicing annunciation which makes people feel that religion brings peace into the heart, and reminds them of the word of the apostle saint Paul: "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4).

The work of the Lord Christ was not only the salvation which he offered on the Cross. But He brought joy to everybody whom He met. That appears from the word of the Bible about Him:

"who went about doing good" (Acts 10:38).

He distributed good things to people. All those who met Him obtained good things from Him. Is He not the One who said: "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). You also, let this style which is of the Lord Christ, be your style.

If you cannot present good in action, present it in words as a good annunciation.

So that people will be optimistic when they see you, as the prophet David said about Ahimaaz the son of Zadok: "He is a good man, and comes with good news" (2 Sam. 18:27). Therefore do not complicate matters before anybody, whatever bad is his condition..... But rather in

the midst of darkness, open for him a window of light, a window of hope, and beware of causing despair to anybody, or of bringing affliction to his soul.....

Let your soul be a relaxing soul so that anyone who hears you gets rest.

Relaxed souls can rest others. People always lean to them in order to have rest..... not with words of flattery or simply to please, but with spirit and truth, and with a beautiful instruction from the Bible and from the lives of saints. Contrarily to other souls who complicate matters; he who sits with them, goes out repeating the psalm: "Many are they who say to me: There is no help for him in God" (Ps. 3:2). They are like the friends of the just Job to whom he said; "Miserable comforters are you all!" (Job 16:2).

Features which are simply relaxed, give rest to people.

Likewise the photographer asks people to smile before taking their pictures, so that their features may be relaxed and acceptable. Likewise when you see a smiling child, from whose face light expands, you rejoice and smile also yourself..... A person when he sees the features of his chief dejected, runs away from meeting him and does not expect good. But if he meets him cheerfully or with a smile, he sees that his cheerfulness brings a good annunciation.

Let everyone who sees you be optimistic and expecting good, and be happy that he begins his day with your cheerful faces.

Even without your saying to them good news.... But their simple encounter with you, will be by itself a rejoicing annunciation. Say to people that God created man to be happy; and when He created him, He put him in Paradise. Then, O Lord, let it be to us according to your word.

The heart which is full of hope, has always a good annunciation inside.

He simultaneously transfers the hope which is in his heart to people; and the joy which is in his heart and which appears at the same time in his features, is conveyed to others. How beautiful is what a saint father said to the saint Amba Antonius: "It is enough for me simply to look at your face, O father"....

Even amidst tribulations, the fathers did not lose their joy. In this respect, the apostle saint Paul said about himself and about his associates in the service: "as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things" (2 Cor. 6:10).

The word of the Lord: "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes", in a rejoicing annunciation.

Thus the apostle Paul said: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13). The rejoicing annunciation which you bring to the sinner, is not for him to think lightly of his condition, but that you

say to him that God is able to save him from his sin; and that he has to begin with repentance, and grace will help him.....

In the first fall of man, and while God was punishing him, He presented a rejoicing annunciation to him.

He said to him that the seed of woman shall bruise the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15). That is wonderful: a promise of salvation at the same moment of reproof. Thus the Lord Christ came from the posterity of the woman, "born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law" (Gal. 4:4-5), and bruise the head of the serpent.

Yes, that is the rejoicing annunciation of the Nativity: "For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11).