

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Solemnity of the Annunciation
March 25, 2019

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Somewhere on my bookshelves is the script of a Nativity play that used to be performed annually at a church in Graham Street, London. In the first scene Blessed Mary is at prayer. When she replies to Gabriel her *Ecce ancilla domini* and *Fiat mihi* the script calls for a trembling pause. Then Gabriel falls on one knee, adoring not Mary herself but the Holy One Who is now incarnate within her.

In the play angels now enter and put a robe and crown on Mary. Then, with candles on either side, they seat her on a stage altar in the very place where the Tabernacle would stand. The *Magnificat* is now sung, and the Blessed Virgin, who at the Annunciation became the living Tabernacle of God made man, is censed. As the play continues towards the Nativity, wherever Mary goes, she is preceded by an angel carrying a lighted candle. It is much like the candle which greets the priest bringing the Blessed Sacrament into a sick room.

This staging of the Nativity play may strike some people as crude or materialistic or a bit “over the top”. But this veneration of Mary is not so different from Biblical scenes of the Creator of the world lying asleep in a fishing boat or eating His lunch sitting on the grass. Those things happened when God became man. Everything connected to the Incarnation is “over the top.”

We will never understand the unique position of Mary among all created beings unless we recognize that for nine months she carried Almighty God within her as she went about her life. Now of course, in a moral and spiritual way, our response, ever since the Resurrection and Pentecost, is our hope to carry God within us. But as a consequence of the Incarnation, what makes Blessed Mary unique is that for nine months *the Virgin’s flesh provided the Saviour’s food*. We may not sanitize or trivialize that fact. What you can say about any woman’s pregnancy you must also say about Mary’s.

The foundation of the Blessed Virgin’s dignity is that Jesus Christ her Son is both God and man. When devotion to Mary is resisted, beneath the objection is an inadequate acceptance of the majesty and splendor of God. The consequence of a low view of God is resistance to setting Mary higher.

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It is impossible to set anyone or anything higher than God. When all is said and done, the Blessed Virgin Mary, the greatest of all creatures, is a creature none the less. Honoring her in the fullness of her dignity and glory is part of the package deal forming some idea of the infinitely vaster glory of God. Mary is infinitely exceeded by her Creator, and praising her helps us to praise her greater Son.

The Annunciation invites us to linger over the greeting of the archangel Gabriel. “Hail, thou that art highly favored.” Let that greeting often rise on our lips. Because this maiden mother so willingly became God’s instrument in His work for our redemption, how can we not love and adore her because of Him? Singing her praises pushes our thought deep into the meaning of God made man, and of the Blessed Virgin Mary whom God chose *and then entered* for the salvation of the world.