

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Solemnity of the Annunciation of
the Lord to the Blessed Virgin Mary
March 25, 2020

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Physical science proposes evolution of the species. Man is the culminating product. Catholics are more specific. The culmination is in *a particular woman*. Blessed Mary is that person. And after the fall in the Garden of Eden, the whole history of Israel is the preparation worked by Almighty God leading to this woman. The Old Testament finds its fruition in one person capable of again receiving the supernatural gifts lost by Adam and Eve. Nature and grace combined in the effort. Mary of Nazareth was the crowning achievement.

Our Lady was certainly no puppet in God's hand! Almighty God created us with the capacity we call "free will." Blessed Mary had the same ability to sin as did her first parents, Adam and Eve, before the fall. But there is a difference. In Mary there was *no inclination to sin*. We must acknowledge that fact but not sentimentalize, romanticize or trivialize her effort.

Blessed Mary needed to choose right in order to act right. She wasn't receiving signals in a quarterback's helmet from her coach at the sidelines! Mary's question at the Annunciation, "How shall this be?" indicates her independence of mind. It also reveals her vow of perpetual virginity had been her own choice. Such vows were neither forced upon, nor expected, of Jewish girls.

Mary's response to the archangel Gabriel was equally free and independent. "Behold the handmaid of the Lord." Our Lady accepted her vocation as Mother of God by the direct and free act of her will. Mary of Nazareth is a willing instrument, not a passive agent. She chose the will of God because there was no inclination in her towards evil such as would have drawn her to refuse. You and I are also given free will, not in order that we disobey God, but to make the free choice to be His loving sons and daughters.

Mary's acceptance was as much the moment of the Incarnation as the words of consecration bring Christ's Presence to the Altar in the Mass. The Lord waits for consent. Just as in the Mass the priest's part is necessary but secondary, so too at the Annunciation Mary's human part is necessary. But the great work is God's.

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All the history of Israel led to the moment of the Annunciation to Mary. That moment was the Incarnation of God. (Christmas is nature's outcome, nine months later.) All the preparation enabled Blessed Mary, when she came, to choose right as the crisis for the world's salvation came to a head. The Old Testament preparation: The Ten Commandments, the high ethical standards found in the Law in *Leviticus* and the great prophets, ensured that in the fullness of time there would be this woman, who would freely choose, in a wonderful, marvelous, and unique way, *to be with the Lord*.