

He was buried in the oratory of Saint John the Baptist, which had been constructed upon the ruins of a temple of Apollo. He flourished about the year of the Lord 518, in the time of the older Justin.

THE ANNUNCIATION

MARCH 25

This feast is called the Annunciation of Our Lord, because on this day the coming of the Son of God in the flesh was announced by an angel. And it was fitting that an angel should announce the Incarnation, because in this wise the fall of the angels was repaired. The Incarnation in sooth took place to repair not only the fall of man, but the ruin of the angels; wherefore the angels were not to be excluded from it. Whence as womankind was admitted to knowledge of the mysteries of the Incarnation and the Resurrection, so likewise was the angelic messenger: for God revealed the one and the other to a woman by means of an angel, namely the Incarnation to the Virgin Mary and the Resurrection to Magdalen.

The Virgin Mary dwelt in the Temple with the other virgins from her third year to her fourteenth, and there made a vow to preserve her chastity, unless God otherwise disposed. Then she was espoused to Joseph, God revealing His will by the flowering of Joseph's staff, as is told in the history of the Nativity of the Blessed Mary. And Joseph went to Bethlehem, his native city, to make all needful preparations for the marriage, while Mary returned to the home of her parents in Nazareth. Nazareth means flower. Whence Bernard says that the Flower willed to be born of a flower, in flower, and in the season of flowers.

And at Nazareth the angel appeared to her and greeted her, saying: 'Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women!' Of this Bernard says: 'Three things invite us to salute Mary; Gabriel's example, John's joyous greeting, and the reward of being greeted in return.' But we must first see why Our Lord wished His mother to be espoused. For this Saint Bernard gives three reasons: 'It was necessary that Mary be espoused to Joseph, in order that by this means the mystery might be hidden from the demons, her virginity might be confirmed by her spouse,

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and her modesty and good renown preserved.' Another reason was that the espousal of Mary would take away the curse from every degree of womankind, namely from virgin, wife and widow; whence the Virgin herself was all of these.

Of the angel's greeting, *Hail, full of grace!*, Bernard says: 'In her womb was the grace of divinity, in her heart the grace of charity, upon her lips the grace of courtesy, in her hands the grace of mercy and generosity. And she was truly full of grace, for of her fulness captives have received redemption, the sick their cure, the sorrowful their comfort, and sinners their pardon; the just have received grace, the angels joy, and the Blessed Trinity glory and honour, and the Son of Man the substance of human flesh.'

Of the angel's words, *the Lord is with thee*, Bernard says: 'God the Father is with thee, Who engendered Him Whom thou conceivest; God the Holy Ghost is with thee, of Whom thou conceivest; God the Son is with thee, Whom thou clothest and surroundest with thy flesh.' And again he says: 'Blessed art thou among women, that is, above all women, because thou shalt be a virgin mother, and God's mother.' For women lay under a threefold curse: shame for those who conceived not, whence Rachel said: 'God hath taken away my reproach'; the curse of sin for those who conceived, whence the Psalm says: 'Behold I was conceived in iniquities, and in sins did my mother conceive me'; and the curse of pain for those who brought forth children, whence Genesis says, 'In sorrow shalt thou bring forth children.' And Mary alone of all women is blessed, because she is virgin and fruitful, she conceives in holiness, and gives birth without pain.

And when Mary heard the angel's words, she was troubled at the saying, and thought with herself what manner of salutation this should be. Let us note that she was troubled at the words of the angel, and not at the sight of him; for the Blessed Virgin had often seen the angels, but had not ever heard them speak such things as these. And then the angel comforted her, saying: 'Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God. Behold thou shalt bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus (that is, Saviour), for He shall save His people from their sins. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High.' This, according to Bernard, means that He, who is great God, shall be great, namely a great man, a great teacher, a great prophet. Then Mary said to the

angel: 'How shall this be done, because I know not man?' By this she meant that she had made a vow never to have knowledge of man. And the angel answering, said to her: 'The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the most High shall overshadow thee.' By this is meant that the Holy Ghost would cause her to conceive; and this was to be for four reasons. The first is that the eminent charity of God might be made manifest, since by the ineffable love of God the Word of God was to be made flesh; for as we read in the Gospel of Saint John, 'God so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him may not perish, but may have life everlasting.' And this reason is given by the Master of the Sentences. The second reason is that by the angel's words it might be evident that the Holy Ghost's conceiving proceeded from grace alone, not being preceded by any human merit: and this reason is given by Saint Augustine. The third reason is that the sole power of God wrought the conception, as Saint Ambrose says. The fourth reason is the motive of the conception; for, as Hugh of Saint Victor writes, 'The motive for a conception according to nature is the love of a man for a woman and of a woman for a man. And therefore since a singular love of the Holy Spirit burned in the Virgin's heart, the love of the Holy Spirit wrought great things in her flesh.' And of the words, *the power of the most High shall overshadow thee*, the *Gloss* says: 'A shadow is formed by light falling upon a body. The Virgin, as a human being, could not hold the fulness of divinity; but the power of the most High overshadowed her, while the incorporeal light of the godhead took a human body within her, and so she was able to bear God.'

Then the angel added: 'And behold thy cousin Elizabeth, she also hath conceived a son in her old age; and this is the sixth month with her that is called barren.' And this he said, according to Saint Bernard, in order that the young maiden, hearing that her aged cousin was with child, might take thought to go and visit Elizabeth, and thus occasion be given to the unborn prophet to do honour to his Lord, and to the miracle of his conception another yet more wondrous be added.

And here, Saint Bernard adds: 'O Virgin, make haste to give thine answer! Answer a word and receive the Word, utter thine own word and receive the Word of God, pronounce a word that shall

pass and embrace a Word that shall not pass, arise, run, be opened! Arise by faith, run by devotion, be opened by thy consent!' And then Mary, extending her hands and raising her eyes to Heaven, said: 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word!' And at once the Son of God was conceived in her womb, perfect God and perfect man; and on the first day of His conception was in Him as much of wisdom and of power as there would be when He was thirty years old. Then rising up, she went into the hill country to visit Elizabeth; and when she saluted her cousin, the infant Saint John leaped with joy in his mother's womb. Of this the *Gloss* says: 'Since he could not manifest his joy with his tongue, he greeted the Lord with joyous heart, and so began his mission as precursor.'

A rich and noble soldier had renounced the world and entered the Cistercian Order. But he was so unlettered that the monks, ashamed of his ignorance, set a teacher to give him lessons. But the lessons were of no avail: he could learn nothing save the two words, *Ave Maria*, which he went about repeating all day long. When he died, and was buried with the other brethren, it came to pass that over his tomb there grew a lovely lily, on each of whose petals were inscribed in letters of gold the words *Ave Maria*. Deeply stirred by this great miracle, the monks cleared the earth from the grave, and saw that the roots of the lily sprang from the dead man's mouth. Thus they understood the great devotion with which he had pronounced these words.

A highwayman had built a stronghold beside a road, and robbed without mercy all that passed by; but every day he recited the Hail Mary, and allowed nothing to prevent him from so doing. One day a saintly monk came down the road, and the brigand's men made ready to rob him: but the holy man asked to be brought to their leader, saying that he had a secret for him. He was led into the chief's presence, and besought him to call together all that dwelt in the fortress, that he might preach the word of God to them. But when they were gathered together, the monk said: 'You are not all here! There is someone missing!' And when he was told that no one was absent, he persisted: 'Look well, and you will see that someone is missing!' Then one of the brigands cried out: 'Sure enough, one of the varlets is absent!' 'Yes,' said the monk, 'and he is the very one for whom I am looking!' They therefore went

in search of him; but when he came within sight of the man of God, he rolled his eyes in fright, threw himself about like a madman, and refused to come nearer. And the holy man said to him: 'In the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ, I adjure thee to say who thou art and why thou art come here!' The varlet made answer: 'Since I am forced to speak, know that I am not a man, but a demon, and I have lived at this brigand's side for fourteen years. Our master sent me to lie in wait for the day when he would neglect to recite the Hail Mary; for on that day he would have fallen to us, and I was ordered to throttle him on the spot. Nothing but this daily prayer kept him from falling into our power. But I spied upon him in vain, for not once did he fail to recite it!' Hearing this, the robber was dumfounded: and he threw himself at the feet of the man of God, begged his pardon, and was thenceforth converted to a better life.

THE PASSION OF OUR LORD

The Passion of Christ was bitter in its pains, an object of contempt in the mockery that was put upon Him, and fruitful in the many benefits that it bestowed.

The pains of the Passion were fivefold. The first pain consisted in the shame of the Passion. For He bore it in a shameful place, Calvary being reserved for the punishment of criminals. The mode of His death was shameful; the cross indeed was the instrument of death unto thieves, and at that time it was the object of obloquy, although now it is the object of glory. Whence Saint Augustine says of it: 'The cross, which was the torture of thieves, now adorns the forehead of emperors: if God bestowed so great honour on the instrument of His suffering, how much more shall He not bestow upon His servant?' And the Passion was shameful because Our Lord suffered in shameful company; He was numbered among the impious, that is, among the thieves. But afterwards, one of them was converted, namely Dismas, who was at the right hand of Christ, as the gospel of Nicodemus says, and the other was condemned, namely Gesmas, who was at the left. To the one therefore He gave the kingdom, to the other damnation.

of both and yet for ever /

Thus endeth the fymble taptes



The Passion of our lord was bitter for the sorow that he suf- fered in various despi- cious / And of many felthies fructuous / The sorow was cause of foue thynges The first by cause it was shamefulle / for the place of the mount of caluarye where as malefactours and criminel prsones were put to execution / And he was there put to deeth right foull / the crosse was the torment of thynges / And yf the crosse was thence of tha- me and of synne / she is now of glo- ry and of honour / wherof sayth saynt Austyn / *Cuius latronum qui erat supplicium et / The crosse whiche was the signe of ghoyle in the fortdes or fowtes of emperours / And yf he had such honour at his torment / what dyde he to hys seruam / for the shame / ful felathshp that he dyde to hym / for he was sette with malefactours / but the one of them was converted /*

whiche was called dysmas / lyke as it is said in the gospel of Nicodemus And he was on the right syde of our lord / And that other on the lyfte syde was dampned whiche was called gesmas / To that one thence he gaf the ropame of heuene / and to that other helte / wherof sayth saynt Ambro- se / *Auctor pietatis in cruce et / he sayth / the autcur of pry hanginge on the crosse dreynd offpys of pry in se calyer evandes / that is to sayr / The persecution to thapostles / was to his disciples / hys body to the jelles hys spyrte to the fadir / to the byrag ne the messages of the uerityng of the fouerayn espouse / To the hys par- dys / To synners helte / And to the crysten penitent he comanded the crosse / So this is the testament that ihu cryste made hanging in the crosse / Secondly the sorow was caused by inu- syte / For none iniquite was founde in hym / And principally inuysyte they accused hym of thre thynges / The first was / they said / that he def- fended to paye the trellage / and for he*