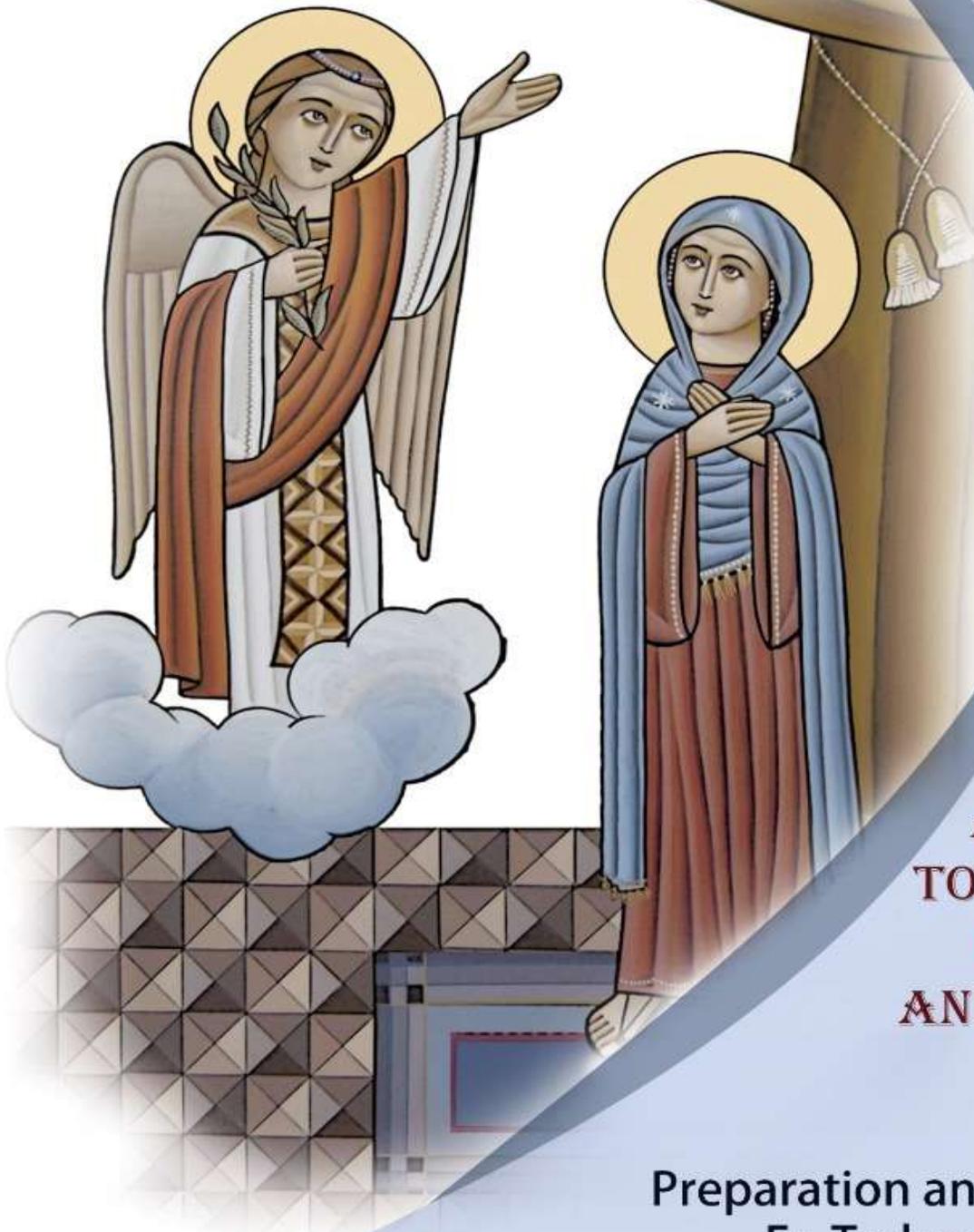




THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE INCARNATE WORD OF GOD



ACCORDING
TO SAINT JACOB
OF SERUGH
AND THE CHURCH
FATHERS

Preparation and Commentary
Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty

The Annunciation of Our Christ the Incarnate Word of God

In the eyes of

St. Jacob of Serugh
and other church fathers

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Preparation and Commentary

Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malty

**St. George Church Sporting, Alexandria
and
Queen Saint Mary & Prince Tadros Church
South Brunswick, USA**

Translation
**Monica Mitri
Mary F.A.
Abanoub Esmat**

Design
Sarah Adel

For the texts of St. Jacob of Serugh regarding the Annunciation of the Archangel Gabriel to St. Mary about the divine incarnation, please refer to the texts translated by our Syriac brethren about it, as well as the book *On The Mother of God*, translated from Syriac to English by Mary Hansbury (Crestwood New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998), and translated to Arabic by Nahed Fouad.

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The Annunciation of our Christ, the Incarnate Word of God

The Annunciation of the Divine Incarnation (Luke 1:26-38)

The encounter of the virgin Mary with archangel Gabriel, when he announced the incarnation of the Word to her, marks the beginning of a new era in believers' lives. It is characterized by a life of exceptional spiritual joy that delights in the knowledge of the Holy Trinity and God's plan for our salvation (Lu 1:26-28). This encounter is the first of the major feasts of our Lord, and the faithful to celebrate it monthly (on the 29th of each Coptic month except for the months of Tobe and Meshir). This encounter moves us from the era of the prophecies, symbols, and divine promises of the Messiah's coming. He is the Savior of the world, and we are granted all these blessings:

1. **We no longer look for God outside us:** as St. Augustine said, that while he was searching for Him in nature and in debates with philosophers, Christ was dwelling in Him, present in his depths, and high above him.
2. **Our enmity with the heavenly ends:** they used to perceive us as traitors to our Creator and breakers of His commandments. But now, the Creator is incarnate and has become human! He opened the path of reconciliation between Him and us, and made us regain His lost image in us, the pearl that we humans lost by not responding to Him with love.
3. The dialogue between St. Mary and the archangel directs **us towards the proper theological path and the growth in knowledge** of the divine sacraments which humans dare not search or talk about. The archangel Gabriel said to the virgin: "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 1:35). This dialogue is considered the key for the divine knowledge for mankind and even for angels. The apostle expressed it by saying: "and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph 3:9-11). What the archangel uttered was later accomplished when the Lord of glory was crucified, died, arose and ascended into heaven. All this, the heavenly ones realized. They saw how God gave the earthly ones the wisdom of the cross, and they experienced the resurrected life and enjoyed the token of heaven while still in the flesh on earth. This was a mystery hidden even from the heavenly ones!

4. The archangel informed the virgin that her relative Elizabeth also conceived a son in her old age (Luke 1:36). This is a **call for believers to rejoice** in God's work with **their brethren in humanity**. **St. Jacob of Serugh** says that Elizabeth wasn't St. Mary's blood relative because Elizabeth was married to Zachariah the priest from the tribe of Levi, while St. Mary was the daughter of David from the tribe of Judah. What the angel meant was that if the heavenly ones rejoiced for Elizabeth enjoyed although she's a human, how much more befitting is it for every believer to rejoice with her as a human.
5. This annunciation aroused deep rejoicing in the heart of Saint Mary, who did not lose her inner peace even when a sword pierced her soul (Luke 2:35). It was this that sustained and strengthened her, so she wasn't destroyed by the widespread resistance to her son, Jesus Christ, and to her personally. She tasted what the apostle Paul later expressed, saying: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20).

6. The archangel's annunciation to Saint Mary about the incarnation of the Word in her womb and the work of the Holy Trinity in her, made her a unique uniting space, and a model for us. Indeed, no human being or heavenly creature will ever achieve what the Mother of God did! But it has opened to us the gate of hope in His love and work in the believers across generations. Saint Jacob of Serugh perceives in her a unique model in the Church of Christ. Through Christ she became a new heaven, the mother of the King of kings, a ship carrying the heavenly treasure, a good field that bore fruit without seeds, and the second Eve, who through her Son fulfilled the first Eve's debt. She presented to her father Adam a garment of glory that conceals his nakedness and removes his shame, a sacred temple for the King of kings and the bride who gave birth through the incarnation of the Word of God from her. Truly she has tremendous beauty!

She opened the door of hope for the human race to enjoy the richness of God's grace, to carry Him in their hearts and to become temples of God and dwelling places of the Holy Spirit, like her.

It is befitting for all believers to realize that what St. Mary has earned is an asset for their own account! Everyone rejoices in this asset according to their spiritual level, through the work of the grace of God in him.

❖ St. Mary is the second heaven, in whose womb the Lord of heaven dwelt and shone forth from her to expel darkness from the lands.

Blessed of women, by whom the curse of the land was eradicated,

and the sentence henceforth has come to an end.

Modest, chaste and filled with beauties of holiness,

Daughter of poor ones, who became mother of the Lord of Kings
and gave riches to a needy world that it might live from Him.

Ship which bore treasure and blessings from the house of the
Father and came and poured out riches on our destitute earth.

Good field which, without seed, gave a sheaf and grew a great
yield while being unploughed.

Second Eve who generated Life among mortals, and paid and rent
asunder that bill of Eve her mother.

Maiden who gave help to the old woman (Eve) who was
prostrate;

she raised her from the Fall where the serpent had thrust her.

Daughter who wove a garment of glory and gave it to her father;
he covered himself because he was stripped naked among the
trees.

Virgin who without marital union marvelously became a mother,
a mother who remained without change in her virginity.

Fair palace which the King built and entered and dwelt in it;
the doors were not opened before Him when He was going out.

Maiden who became like the heavenly chariot⁶ and solemnly
carried that Mighty One, bearing Creation.

Bride who conceived although the bridegroom had never been
seen by her;

she gave birth to a baby without her coming to the place of his
Father...

❖ Then He sent her a watcher¹, from the heavenly legions, that he
might bring the good tidings to the blessed one, most fair.

Gabriel, the great chief of the hosts, descended;

he went down to her as he had been sent from God.

Because she alone was worthy of the great mystery which was
rich in divine revelations.

¹ Syriac poetry often refers to angels as watchers (*sahir* in Arabic).

With prayers and in limpidity and in simplicity,
Mary received that spiritual revelation.
She being holy and standing in wonder in God's presence,
her heart was poured forth with love in prayer before Him.
*She was in prayer, as also Daniel was in prayer,
when this same Watcher of light descended to him.
While Zachary the priest was standing in the Sanctuary to pray
before God, the Watcher visited him.
This maiden who was capable of receiving a more important
revelation,
she was in prayer when she received the Watcher who had
descended.
Prayer which is limpid conspires with God;
it speaks to Him, listens to Him and confides in Him.*¹

St. Jacob of Serugh

The angel's greeting to her

- ❖ "Rejoice, O full of grace, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was.

The Watcher said: "Do not be afraid, O full of mercy,
the Lord has chosen you that in your virginity you might be his
Mother.

"Behold from this time you will solemnly conceive;
you will give birth to the great One whose Kingdom is without
end."

Mary said: "How then will what you say happen since man has

¹ Jacob of Serugh, *On the Mother of God*, translated by Mary Hansbury (Crestwood New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998).

never been known to me, how will I bring forth?

“You have announced a Son to me but I am not conscious of marital union;

I have heard of nativity but I see no marriage.”

That moment was full of wonder when Mary was standing, conversing in argument with Gabriel.

One humble daughter of poor folk and one angel met each other and spoke of a wonderful tale.

A pure virgin and a fiery Watcher spoke with wonder: a discourse which reconciled dwellers of earth and heaven.

One woman and the prince of all the hosts had made an agreement for the reconciliation of the whole world.

The two had sat between heavenly beings and earthly ones; they spoke, attended to and made peace for those who were wroth.

Maiden and Watcher met each other and conversed in argument on the matter,

until they abolished the conflict between the Lord and Adam.

That great strife which occurred amidst the trees (Genesis 3:1-7) came up for discussion, and it all came to an end; there was peace.

An earthly being and a heavenly one spoke with love;

the struggle between the two sides ceased, and they were at peace.

St. Jacob's Serugh

The verdict on Eve was dropped by the annunciation to the new Eve

Saint Irenaeus sought to see St. Mary's role in God's plan for our salvation, by offering full submission to God in full freedom, offering obedience arising from faith, instead of the disobedience in which Eve fell in.

St. Irenaeus called St. Mary: Eve's intercessor or Eve's advocate, he says: [While Eve disobeyed God, Mary obeyed him, so that the Virgin Mary would become the advocate or intercessor of the virgin Eve.]

Origen of Alexandria points to St. Mary, as having restored the dignity of women which they lost through the sin of Eve. Thus, they will be saved in childbearing (Timothy 2:15). He also says: [The joy that Gabriel trumpeted to Mary removed the judgment of grief issued by God against Eve] [As the sin began with the woman and then crossed over to the man, this is how the annunciation began with the women (Mary and Elizabeth).]

St. Ephrem the Syrian says: [Eve concealed her virginity with the leaves of shame. As for her mother (Saint Mary), in her virginity, she wore the garment of glory, which suffices for all. She presented a piece of clothing (the body) to the one who clothe everyone.] [By the eye, Eve saw the beauty of the tree, and the counsel of the slayer (Satan) was formed in her mind ... As for Mary, with the ear, she realized the invisible that came to her through the voice. She bore in her womb the power that came to her body.)

- ❖ The evil time which had killed Adam was changed;
another good time came in which he would be raised.
Instead of that serpent, Gabriel arose to speak;
instead of Eve, Mary began to consent. Instead of the treacherous
one who brought death by the tale he set forth,

the truthful one arose to announce life by the tidings which he brought.

Instead of the mother who wrote among the trees what she owed, the daughter paid all the debts of Adam, her father.

Eve and the serpent with the Watcher and Mary were transmuted; that affair was put right which had become distorted from the beginning.

See how Eve's ear inclines and hearkens to the voice of the deceiver when he hisses deceit to her.

But come and see the Watcher instilling salvation into Mary's ear and removing the insinuation of the serpent from her and consoling her.¹

St. Jacob's Serugh

A comparison between Eve and Mary, and between Gabriel and Satan (the serpent)

Since Eve heard the advice of the serpent that both she and Adam would become like God, knowing good and evil, Eve did not ask the serpent how to become like God? As for Mary, when she heard the annunciation from the angel, she inquired in the spirit of humility about her pregnancy (Genesis 3:1-6; Luke 1:26-38). During this dialogue between St. Mary and the Angel, we enjoy a heavenly explanation of the mystery of the divine incarnation. The wise Mary became the voice of the church, asking the question that reveals the divine mystery.

- ❖ That building which the serpent pulled down, Gabriel built up; Mary rebuilt the foundation which Eve broke down in Eden. Two virgins who received the message from two messengers;

¹ Jacob of Serugh, *On the Mother of God*, translated by Mary Hansbury.

two by two, generations were sent forth, one against another.
Satan sent a secret to Eve by means of the serpent;
the Lord sent the good tidings to Mary by means of the Watcher.
A confutation of the discourse which the serpent spoke,
Gabriel made against the evil one in the ear of Mary on account of
Eve.

He renewed the discourse but refuted the arguments with his
words;

he spoke the truth and removed all falsehood.

A virgin was beguiled by the mischief maker in Eden;

her ear piped the sound of the great deception.

Instead of this virgin another was chosen;

truth was spoken to her in her ear from the Most High

By the door which death entered, by it entered life

and loosened the great bond which the evil one had bound there.

Where sin and death had abounded from the beginning,

also grace was made to abound which would vivify Adam.

The serpent did not salute Eve when speaking to her,

for there is no peace in the way which is full of death.

He chanted deception to her, fanned falsehood upon her, on

her virginity poured forth evil counsels and deceitful answers.

Enmity, conspiracy to kill and desire for blood,

he placed in the midst of the discourse which he had delivered to
the house of Adam.

The Watcher sent by the Son, went and stood firm against these
things;

to Mary he brought the tidings of salvation from God.

He saluted her, implanted life in her, proclaimed peace to her;

he encountered her with love and brought to an end the former
things.

That wall of iniquity which the serpent had built then,

by his descent the Son of God broke it down that it might never again be restored.

When He descended He broke down the hedge which was placed between the sides, that there might be peace between dwellers on earth and in heaven.

On this account, the Watcher had saluted Mary as a pledge of great peace for the whole world.

“Hail Mary, our Lord is with you,” he was saying to her, “you will conceive and bear a son in your virginity.”

- ❖ She said to him (the angel): “How will this be as you say, since I am a virgin and there is no fruit of virgins?”

In that moment it was very necessary to question, so that the mystery of the Son dwelling in her might be explained to her.

Mary inquired in order that we might learn from the angel concerning that conception which is a sublime matter beyond understanding.

Behold how most fair is Mary to the one who beholds her, and how loveable these things of hers to the ones who are capable of discerning.

This one inquires that she might learn from him about her conception,

because it was hers and for the profit of the one who listens to her.

Eve had not questioned the serpent when he led her astray, she who by her will kept silent and firmly believed the treachery.

The latter maiden heard truth from the faithful one, nevertheless in this way she had sought out an explanation.

- ❖ Blessed Mary, who by her questions to Gabriel, taught the world this mystery which was concealed.

For if she had not asked him how it would be, we would not have learned the explanation of the matter of the Son.
The beauty of the matter which appeared openly is because of her; she was the reason that it was explained to us by the angel.
By that question, the wise one became the mouth of the Church; she learned that interpretation for all Creation.
For if Mary had not had sublime impulses, she would not have arrived to speak before the Watcher.
If she had not possessed inner and outer beauty, Gabriel also would not have answered her with eloquence.
She rose up to this measure on her own, until the Spirit, that perfecter of all came to her.
She was full of grace from God which was more exalted than all; the Only-Begotten dwelt in her womb to renew all.¹

St. Jacob of Serugh

The Virgin Mary and the bride

St. Mary is the first member of the virgin Church, the heavenly Bride. This annunciation of truth is a call to every believer to ask for God's work in him and in all humans and to rejoice for all those who enjoy the divine blessing.

St. Ambrose says: [Mary was the virgin wife, that represents the church that is without blemish. The Church is the virgin bride of Christ, she has carried us by the Holy Spirit and gave birth to us without pain, and Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit, not by marriage and thus she became the representative of all churches that bear fruit by the Spirit and grace, although she is ostensibly united with a human shepherd.]

Saint Augustine says: [As Mary gave birth to He, who is the Head, so the Church gave birth to you, because the Church is also a mother and a virgin, a mother in our love, and a virgin in her unshakable faith.]

¹ Jacob of Serugh, *On the Mother of God*, translated by Mary Hansbury.

She is the mother of many nations who represent one body, similar to the virgin, who is the mother of many and at the same time she is the mother of the One.]

Saint Cyril the Great says: [Let us glorify Mary, the ever-virgin with praises of joy, who is herself the Holy Church.]

❖ How can I form an image of this most fair one, with ordinary colors whose mixtures are not suitable for her?

The image of her beauty is more glorious and exalted than my composition;

I do not dare let my mind depict the form of her image.

It is easier to depict the sun with its light and its heat than to tell the story of Mary in its splendor.

Perhaps the rays of the sphere can be captured in pigments, but the tale concerning her is not completely told by those who preach.

If anyone ventures, in what order can he describe her and with what class must he mix to tell it with?

With virgins, with saints, with the chaste?

With married women, with mothers or with handmaids?

Behold the body of the glorious one carries tokens of virginity and milk, perfect birth yet sealed womb; who is equal to her?

While it seems that she is in the company of maidens,

I see her, like a handmaid, giving milk to the lad.

While I hear that Joseph her husband dwells with her,

I behold her who is not joined in conjugal union.

While I seek to reckon her in the order of virgins,

behold the sound of birth pangs striking her, comes to me.

Because of Joseph, I think to call her a married woman,

but I believe that she has not been known by any mortal.

I see her who bears the son of a fertile mother,

yet it seems to me that she belongs in the order of virgins.
She is virgin and mother and wife of a husband yet unmated;
how may I speak if I say that she is incomprehensible?

Love moves me to speak of her, which is proper,
but the height of her discourse is too difficult for me; what
will I do?

I will cry openly that I have not been fit nor am I yet,
and I will return because of love that I might recount her story
which is exalted.

Only love does not reproach when speaking,
because its way is pleasing and enriches the one who hears it.
With wonder I will speak of Mary while I stand in awe,
because the daughter of earthly beings has ascended to such a
high rank.

St. Jacob of Serugh

He shall be called a Nazarene (Matthew 2:23; Mark 1:24)

The Bible identifies the name of the city to which the angel came to meet the Blessed Virgin Mary, which is "Nazareth". A city in Galilee in northern Palestine, 88 miles north of Jerusalem, and 15 miles southwest of Tiberias. Saint Joseph and the Blessed Virgin Mary lived there, and the Lord Jesus Christ spent the greater part of the first thirty years of his life there (Luke 3: 23; Mark 1: 9), and "He shall be called a Nazarene" (Matthew 2:23; Mark 1:24). As he began his mission, the people of Nazareth rejected Him twice (Luke 4: 28-31; Matthew 4: 13; 13: 54-58; Mark 6: 1-6). It is located on a hill (Luke 4:29), and it had no significance, and it was not mentioned in the Old Testament, nor in the documents of the great nations before the coming of Christ, or in the writings of the Jewish historian Josephus. Perhaps the word "Nazareth" means "a rod" or "a branch", and for this reason the Lord Jesus was often called the branch.

Blessed are you among women!

The angel's greeting: "Rejoice, O full of grace, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" (Luke 1:28). It wasn't an ordinary greeting but a unique one, carrying all meanings of joy. The Greek word *shere*, translated here as "rejoice", was translated about 80 times in the Septuagint: in half of those it was translated as "rejoice" and in the other half it expressed the joy of God's people with their salvation. As if St. Mary received this outstanding joy of the incarnation of the Word of God and His dwelling in her, on behalf of the whole church in which she is a member. Here are some commentaries of the church fathers on this unique greeting:

- ❖ She was alone called "full of grace", as she alone obtained the grace that no one else possessed, and she was filled with the gifts of grace.

St. Ambrose

- ❖ This Nativity is absolutely a grace, in which union occurred, the union of God and man and the Word with the body....good deeds were not enough to achieve it.

St. Augustine

- ❖ She was clothed with divine grace as a robe, and her soul was filled with divine wisdom, in her heart she enjoyed union with God, and she received Him in her womb.

St. Theodosius the Bishop of Ankara

Saint Mary heard the angel say to her: "The Lord is with you." This expression had its own concept for her. She tasted fellowship with God on a unique level. She carried the word of God in her womb and offered him from her body and blood!

“Blessed are you among women” ... as **Origen of Alexandria** says: [The joy that Gabriel bestowed upon Mary removed the judgment of grief issued by God against Eve.] [As sin began with the woman and then it crossed over to the man, so began the annunciation to the women (Mary and Elizabeth).

“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 favor with God.” (Luke 1:29-30)

Saint Jerome says: [She was troubled and could not respond to him, since she had never given a greeting to a man before, but when she knew who he was, she answered him. This is the one who was afraid to talk to a man, and she began to talk to an angel without fear.]

A living model for maidens

Many fathers see that the virgin Mary as a living model for virgins who are devoted to worship, walking in extreme modesty, do not meet men, but spend their lives at their homes or in the homes of virgins, not dealing with men. But we cannot deny that despite the extreme modesty and devotion to the Lord that characterized the Virgin, and her unwillingness to marry, as appears from her saying to the angel: “How can this be, since I do not know a man?”, she was the active person in the holy congregation. Active by her prayers and piety, and active also by her acceptance of the supreme gift of God (the Word is incarnated in her womb), and active in serving, in the first miracle of the Lord Christ she asked him: “They have no wine”. She accompanied the Lord to the cross, and after the Ascension, she stayed with the disciples supporting them. Virginity does not mean passivity, but

rather the positivity of the sacrificial love proclaimed during worship and work, within the limits of the human gifts that one receives from the Lord himself. That is why **St. Augustine** says: [Virginity is not honored for its own sake, but rather for its affiliation with God.]

And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end

“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 1:31-33)

Saint Mary enjoyed this divine conception, as the Son of the Most High was incarnated in her, who was watched by the men of the Old Testament as a King who sits on the throne of David and reigns forever, and as a savior, Who is called Jesus who means Jehovah, my salvation.

❖ No one is like the Mother of God, for although you inhabited the earth, you became the mother of the Creator.

(The Paralex) the blessing hymn.

❖ If the Son of God became a son of David, then do not doubt, O son of Adam, that you will become a son of God. If God had descended to such depths, He did not do this in vain, but rather to raise us to the highest! He was born in the flesh, so that you might be born again according to the spirit. He was born of a woman, so that you could become a son of God.

St. John Chrysostom

The Virgin Mary is born from a virgin mother

When Saint Mary heard the divine promise, in a spirit of humility and faith, she was astonished! The promise was wholly unique, and no one has ever received a similar promise in the Holy Scriptures. She asked: **"How can this be, since I do not know a man?"**

And the angel answered and said to her, "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).

- A. It appears from the Virgin's words that she vowed virginity, so if she wanted to marry she would not have said this, but would rather say: "When will this be ?!" Waiting for the fulfillment of the promise by marriage. She set in her heart to be a virgin to the Lord, so the Virgin dwelt in her, to sanctify through her, the spiritual virginity of the Church. And as **Saint Augustine** says: [Today the virgin Church celebrates the virgin birth ... The Lord Jesus Christ confirmed the virginity of the heart that He wanted for the Church first through the virginity of St. Mary. The Church alone can be a virgin only when she is related to a Bridegroom, namely, the son of the virgin, as she presents herself completely to Him.]
- B. **Saint Ambrose** says: [Mary did not refuse to believe in the words of the angel, nor did she decline it, but rather showed her readiness for it, as for the phrase: "How can this be?" does not denote suspicion, but rather a question of how the matter will be fulfilled. She is trying to find a solution to the problem, and it is her right to know how the miraculous birth will take place.] Therefore, the angel's answer to her reveals the secret of God's work in her to achieve this birth: **"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."**

The Holy Spirit comes upon her to sanctify her, spiritually and physically, so she is prepared for the work of the Father, who sends His Son in her womb to incarnate from her. Truly, what an exalted divine secret, in which God proclaims His wondrous love and honor for man!

Obedience and humility of the Virgin

Before this proclamation, she bowed her head in obedience to say: "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). Zechariah the priest doubted that his wife can give birth in her old age, and the virgin believed, and in her obedience she accepted the work of God, and as **Saint Ambrose** says: [In her faith she surpassed the priest; So the priest sinned and hid, and the Virgin corrected the mistake.] So Zachariah became silent because of his doubt, and the virgin conceived the Incarnate Word who would not be silent.

Saint Irenaeus believes that the obedience of Saint Mary took the place of the disobedience of her mother, Eve. The latter, by her disobedience, complicated the matter, and her daughter came to resolve the problem with obedience. Theologians believe that in these moments when she offered obedience and submission to God, she accepted the incarnation, as it was not possible for the incarnation to take place without her acceptance, as God sanctifies human freedom. **Saint Ambrose** says: [She describes herself as a maidservant of the Lord even though she was chosen to be the mother of God, because the promise that has been fulfilled did not make her fall into pride.] And **Saint Augustine** says that the humble Master Christ does not teach His mother - in conceiving Him - pride but humility! Through the free grace of God, Saint Mary enjoyed being chosen as the Mother of God the Word. This grace found a response from her side, as she was very

beautiful herself, adorned with humility, purity and tenderness. God dwells with the humble, and in them.

❖ **Now did grace itself bend down the Son to her, or was she so beautiful that she became Mother to the Son of God?**

That God descended on earth by grace is manifest, and since Mary was very pure she received Him.

He looked on her humility and her gentleness and her purity, and dwelt in her because it is easy for Him to dwell with the humble.

“On whom will I gaze except the gentle and humble?”

He looked on and dwelt in her because she was humble among those who are born.

Even she herself said that He looked on her lowliness and dwelt in her, because of this she shall be extolled, for she was so pleasing.¹

St. Jacob of Serugh

The secret to her greatness is her humility.

Saint Jacob of Serugh talks about humility as a basis for Christian life similar to what Saint Aphrahat said: [Jacob's humbled himself, so he triumphed over the anger of his brother Esau and the four hundred men who were with him (Genesis 33: 1-4). Joseph humbled himself, so he triumphed over the anger of his brothers who envied and hated him (Genesis 50: 20-21). With humility, Moses triumphed, and broke all the pride of Pharaoh (Exodus 6:30). David's humility defeated the pride of

¹ Jacob of Serugh, *On the Mother of God*, translated by Mary Hansbury; Jacob of Serugh, *Tarjama men Al-Suryania Ila Al-Arabeyya Wa Derasa Ala Myamer Al-Malfan Mar Ya'coub Al-Serugy (A Translation from Syriac to Arabic and Study on the Mimre of the Teacher Mar Jacob Al-Serugy)*. Translated by Behnam Sony, Part One (Baghdad, 2003), Homily 196 on the Blessed Virgin Mother of God Mary, and homily 197 on The Annunciation of the Mother of God.

Goliath, who rushed towards him in anger (1 Sam 17: 45-51). Hezekiah's humility prevailed over the threat of Sennacherib, who blasphemed. And Mordecai's humility triumphed over all the haughtiness of Haman. By their humility, Daniel and his colleagues triumphed over the wicked who slandered them.]¹

❖ Humility is total perfection, so that when man first beholds God, then he behaves humbly.

For Moses was humble, a great one among all men;

God went down to him on the mountain in revelation.

Again humility is seen in Abraham, for although he was just, he called himself dust and ashes.

Again also John was humble because he was proclaiming that he was not worthy to loose the sandals of the Bridegroom, his Lord.

By humility, the heroic in every generation have been pleasing, because it is the great way by which one draws near to God.

But no one on earth was brought low like Mary, and from this it is manifest that no one was exalted like her.

In proportion to lowliness, the Lord also bestows manifestation; He made her his mother and who is like her in humility?

If there were another, purer and gentler than she, in this one He would dwell and that one renounce so as not to dwell in her.

And if there were a soul more splendid and holy, rather than hers, He would choose this one and forsake that one.²

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹ *Demonstrations*, 9: 3.

² Jacob of Serugh, *On the Mother of God*, translated by Mary Hansbury; Jacob of Serugh, *Tarjama men Al-Suryania Ila Al-Arabeyya Wa Derasa Ala Myamer Al-Malfan Mar Ya'coub Al-Serugy (A Translation from Syriac to Arabic and Study on the Mimre of the Teacher Mar Jacob Al-Serugy)*. Translated by Behnam Sony, Part One (Baghdad, 2003), Homily 196 on the Blessed Virgin Mother of God Mary, and homily 197 on The Annunciation of the Mother of God.

God chose Mary for her inner beauty

Some Fathers such as Irenaeus, Origen, and John Chrysostom believed that Saint Mary did not live without actual sins, but their opinions did not represent the expanding Marian tradition in the early Church.

The Church believes in Mary's unique holiness that surpasses the heavenly creation, even the cherubim and the seraphim. She spent her life in holiness as the true ark of covenant of nondecaying wood and covered with gold inside and out. Here are some excerpts from some of the fathers' writings on this:

- ❖ How can I form an image of this most fair one, with ordinary colors whose mixtures are not suitable for her?

The image of her beauty is more glorious and exalted than my Composition.....She lived wise and full of love for God ... She was never defiled by bad lusts, but rather she became righteous since her childhood on the true path without error or stumbling.

St. Jacob of Serugh

- ❖ The Word of the Father came from the bosom of the Father, and in another bosom he put on a body, He came from one bosom to another bosom. The two pure bosoms were filled with Him. Blessed is He who lives in us!

St. Ephrem the Syrian

- ❖ Our Lord descending to earth beheld all women;
He chose one for himself who among them all was pleasing.
He searched her and found humility and holiness in her, and limpid impulses and a soul desirous of divinity.
And a pure heart and every reckoning of perfection because of this

He chose her, the pure and most fair one.

He descended from his place and dwelt within the glorious one among women, because for her there was not a companion comparable to her in the world.

She alone is humble, pure, limpid and without blemish, so that she was deemed worthy to be his mother and not another.

He observed her, how exalted and pure from evil, nor stirs in her an impulse inclined to lust.

And she allows no thought for luxury, nor worldly conversation which causes cruel harm.

Desire for worldly vanity does not burn in her, nor is she occupied with childish things.

He saw that there was not like her nor equal to her in the world.

And since His grace is greater than that of all who are born, the beauty of Mary shall be much extolled because she was his mother, she had insight, and filled with the love of God, because our Lord does not dwell where there is no love. When the great king decided to come to our place, he was pleased to dwell in the purest body on all the earth. He dwelt in the womb that was adorned with virginity, and in the thoughts that were worthy of holiness.

She was full of beauty in her nature as well as in her will, because she was not likened to any impure desires.

From her childhood, she rose firmly in flawless holiness and walked the road blamelessly.

She preserved her original nature with a will tending towards good, because there were always signs of her virginity in the flesh, and the sanctities in herself.

What happened to her gave me the strength to speak of her indescribable beauty.

Because she became the mother of the Son of God, I saw and

believed that she was the only woman in this world that is completely pure.

Because, since she began to refuse evil and choose good (Isaiah 7:16), she has established the purity of the heart and the integrity of the mind. She did not depart from the righteousness according to the law, and she was never bothered by any heart or body desire.

Since her childhood the signs of holiness were evident in her, and in its privilege she increased with great care.

The Lord was always before her eyes in all her days, so she always looked to Him, until she was enlightened, and in Him she found all her pleasure. And seeing how pure she was, He wanted to dwell in her, because she was pure from all evils.

As He had never seen a woman like her, the wondrous work that was the greatest of all was done in her.

The daughter of man, who was found among women, was chosen because she was the most beautiful of them all. ¹

St. Jacob of Serugh

He chose her with the perfection of her righteous will

Saint Mary's inner beauty is a divine gift. God does not give spiritual beauty by force, but through the perfection of human will. He wants us as His children, and we ask him to pour His beauty on us, but we are not machines that he drives, ignoring our will. He sanctifies the freedom of will!

❖ The father wanted and wished to have a mother for His Son, and he did not find someone like the one He chose to become his mother.

¹Jacob of Serugh, *On the Mother of God*, translated by Mary Hansbury; Jacob of Serugh, *Tarjama men Al-Suryania Ila Al-Arabeyya Wa Derasa Ala Myamer Al-Malfan Mar Ya'coub Al-Serugy (A Translation from Syriac to Arabic and Study on the Mimre of the Teacher Mar Jacob Al-Serugy)*. Translated by Behnam Sony, Part One (Baghdad, 2003), Homily 196 on the Blessed Virgin Mother of God Mary, and homily 197 on The Annunciation of the Mother of God.

A girl, full of beauty from within, dressed in it, pure in heart, so that she would see the mysteries that were done in her. This is beauty, when a person is beautiful from within, the glory and greatness of perfection lies in her will. No matter how great the beauty of God is, it cannot be praised if freedom does not exist.

The sun is beautiful, but it is not praised by its viewers, because it is known that it is not her will that gave her light. He who possesses beauty from within, is praised for his beauty (which was fulfilled according to his desire).

Even God also loves the beauty that (comes) from the will, for He praises the good will when it does His pleasure. And this Virgin, whose story we tell, thanks to her good will, pleased God, and she was chosen.

He descended to become a man from the daughter of man, because she was the object of His pleasure, and she was chosen so that He might come from her.

And because His grace is greater than all those who are born, Mary's beauty increases greatly because she became His mother.

Through her humility, purity, uprightness, and good will, she was the object of God's pleasure, so He chose her if there were another that pleased the Lord more than she did, then He would have chosen the other, because God does not show partiality, as he is just and righteous (2Chronicles 19: 7; Acts 10: 34; Galatians 2: 6).

If there was found impurity or deficiency in her, He would have searched for another mother with no defile, this beauty which is the purest of all beauty, is found in that which possessed it by means of good will.

Based on this, every person has the right to marvel at this glorified one, because it was very pleasing even to God who chose her to be His mother.¹

St. Jacob of Serugh

Her sacred will is a divine gift.

All the spiritual beauty of St. Mary, her righteousness, God's choice for her to become the mother of God and her glory ... all this was through the grace of God. St. Mary still needed salvation, just like all her siblings in humanity! And she became a unique example of rejoicing in this salvation.

St. Ambrose writes: [When the Lord wanted to save the world, He began his work with Mary, so that through the salvation that is offered for all, she would be **the first** to enjoy the fruit of salvation provided by the Son.²] **St. Augustine** says: [Mary came from Adam... Adam died because of sin. As for the body of the Lord, which comes from Mary, He died to destroy sin.³]

This Orthodox concept preserved our Church away from any exaggeration or confusion between what concerns Christ and what concerns His mother.

We do not find an Orthodox theologian who calls St. Mary a "partner in salvation" and we do not offer her worship but honor and praise.

❖ She was pleasing as much as it is given nature to be beautiful, but she did not reach this measure by her will.

Hitherto she strove with human virtue, but that God should shine

¹ Jacob of Serugh, *On the Mother of God*, translated by Mary Hansbury; Jacob of Serugh, *Tarjama men Al-Suryania Ila Al-Arabeyya Wa Derasa Ala Myamer Al-Malfan Mar Ya'coub Al-Serugy (A Translation from Syriac to Arabic and Study on the Mimre of the Teacher Mar Jacob Al-Serugy)*. Translated by Behnam Sony, Part One (Baghdad, 2003), Homily 196 on the Blessed Virgin Mother of God Mary, and homily 197 on The Annunciation of the Mother of God.

² Exp. in Luc. 2:17.

³ W.J. Burghardt: *The Testimony of the Patristic Age concerning Mary's death*, Maryland, 1957, p.11.

forth from her, was not of her own doing.
As far as the just ones drew near to God, the most fair one drew near by the virtue of her soul.
But that the Lord shone from her bodily,
His grace it is, may He be praised because of so much mercy!
The beauty of Mary is beyond measure, because another who is greater than she has not arisen in all the world.
From this time forth let us give what is due to the Lord,
because He has shed his grace on creatures without measure.
and now this of Mary whom among mothers there is no one greater than she.
She was made pure like John and like Elisha, like Elias and like Melchisedek, who were renowned.
She ascended to this degree of these heights in beauty,
so she was chosen to be the Mother of the Son of the Holy One.
She drew near to the limit of virtue by her soul;
so, that grace which is without limit dwelt in her.
She who was full of the beauty of holiness looked to the Lord;
He sought to dwell solemnly in her pure womb.¹

St. Jacob of Serugh

How does the angel call Elizabeth the Levite a relative of Mary, though she comes from the house of David and Judah?

- ❖ “And behold Elizabeth your next of kin who was sterile is pregnant; she also has marvelously conceived in her latter years.”

¹ Jacob of Serugh, *On the Mother of God*, translated by Mary Hansbury; Jacob of Serugh, *Tarjama men Al-Suryania Ila Al-Arabeyya Wa Derasa Ala Myamer Al-Malfan Mar Ya'coub Al-Serugy (A Translation from Syriac to Arabic and Study on the Mimre of the Teacher Mar Jacob Al-Serugy)*. Translated by Behnam Sony, Part One (Baghdad, 2003), Homily 196 on the Blessed Virgin Mother of God Mary, and homily 197 on The Annunciation of the Mother of God.

How could the wife of the high priest be a kinswoman of Mary, being herself a Levite and Mary is of the house of David? The tribe of Levi consisted of priests and not of kings; that of Judah put forth kings, behold, out of David. The tribe of kings was distant from the Levites, but why did the Watcher call the sterile one Mary's next of kin? A relation is one whose family is very near, but that Levite was distant from the woman of Judah's tribe. She was not from her tribe and not from the family of the blessed one. Why then was she called her kinswoman by that fiery one? That Mary is from Judah and from the house of David, the Book testifies in the census in which she was inscribed. And Joseph the just one, her spouse, her kin, also of the same race; it is written of him that he was from that tribe of Judah. They required him to go to Bethlehem for the census as there the tribe of David was inscribed. Mary was led with him, as daughter of the same family, because both of them were known to be of the same tribe. But Elizabeth the wife of the priest, daughter of Levites, was a Levite with her husband the high priest. That the Watcher should deceive saying one thing instead of another is not possible: no, the company of Gabriel does not deceive.¹

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹ Jacob of Serugh, *On the Mother of God*, translated by Mary Hansbury.

Gabriel did not distinguish between tribe and tribe, but between human race and angels.

- ❖ So why then did he call the daughter of David a kinswoman of the daughter of the Levites? Let us listen willingly.

That angel is not of human nature, but is of spiritual origin, a sublime nature.

The case of the two women fell together as far as the angel was concerned so he called them kinswomen, as truly they are.

As though one might say: "You are a daughter of man, and she is a daughter of man; you are a virgin but she is truly sterile."

There is no way for a virgin to give birth nor is an old sterile one ever able to bring forth.

But if God commands that even sterile ones beget, and also virgins, who can resist Him or who can hinder Him?

He commands the old sterile one to bring forth, for she is your kinswoman, she is also of the human race.

Also to you, daughter of man, He gave a command that in your virginity, you bring forth a child whose Kingdom is without end.

Now, friend, understand for what cause, behold, Elizabeth was called a kinswoman of Mary.

That angel does not distinguish between one tribe and another, but between the race of men and of angels.

As though one might say: "I am an angel and you are women, and to both of you I have descended to bring good tidings.

"The Lord sent me to go down and to say that the sterile one is engendering, and now He sends me to announce that the Virgin will bring forth.

"Behold in the sterile one, a voice which goes forth to prepare the way; behold in you, the Word will arise to give life to the whole world."

Now therefore do not doubt what you hear about Mary who is kinswoman of the daughter of Levites,

For it is not written that Mary was of the house of Levi, nor is Elizabeth imagined to be of the house of David.

Mary is truly the daughter of David, for the Son of David is the fruit of her flesh.

As for that "kinship," which was proclaimed by the angel, that spiritual being simply sought to compare one woman with another:

"Behold Elizabeth your kinswoman has conceived a son in her old age!"

And Mary went to see the truth which was spoken to her.¹

St. Jacob of Serugh

Blessed are you and blessed are you (Luke 1: 46-55)

- ❖ Because of her, confusion of face was lifted from womanhood; the reproach of all women passed away from the nations. Because of her, the way to Eden which had been blocked was opened, the serpent fled and men passed along it to God. Because of her, the Cherub had removed his lance that he might no longer guard. The Tree of Life which offered itself to those who ate it. She gave us a sweet fruit, full of life, that we might eat from it and live forever with God. The Great Sun of Righteousness shone forth from her, and a glorious light which banished darkness from the region.

¹ Jacob of Serugh, *On the Mother of God*, translated by Mary Hansbury.

❖ The Father chose her to be the mother of His Only-begotten, on this account, great is her blessing above those who are born.
“All nations henceforth will call me blessed,”
Mary said, by the light of her soul on account of her fruit.
She beheld to which high rank she had ascended, that the world with great wonder would call her blessed.
She foresaw the future and said of it, that the peoples of the earth would call her virginity blessed.
By the Spirit she learned that her Son is the King of all the Gentiles; in tribute, she required a blessing from the nations.

❖ Therefore, we also say “blessed” to the blessed one whose blessing is truly more sublime than the praises of the whole world.
Blessed is she who received the Holy Spirit; He purified and polished her, and He made her a temple, and the Lord Most High dwelt in her abode.

Blessed is she because the great beauty of her virginity subsists; her name shines valiantly forever.

Blessed is she, for by means of her, joy came to Adam’s race; through her the fallen arose who had been cast down from the house of the Father.

Blessed is she who is exalted above the union of marriage, yet her face is unveiled to the beloved Child of mothers.

Blessed is she whose body was never defiled by lust, behold, it is resplendent with the fair fruit of her virginity.

Blessed is she in whose small and barren womb dwelt the Great One by whom the heavens are filled and are too small for Him.

Blessed is she who bore that Ancient one who generated Adam, and by whom are made new all creatures who have become old.

Blessed is she who gave drops of milk from her members to that One at whose command the waves of the great sea gushed forth.

Blessed is that one who carried, embraced and caressed like a child God mighty for evermore, by whose hidden power the world is carried.

Blessed is she from whom the Savior appeared to the captives; in his zeal He bound the captor and reconciled the earth.

Blessed is she who placed her pure mouth on the lips of that One, from whose fire, the Seraphim of fire hide themselves.

Blessed is she who nourished as a babe with pure milk the great breast from which the worlds⁴¹ suck life.

Blessed is she whose Son calls blessed all the blessed!

Blessed is that One who solemnly appeared to us from your purity!¹

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹ Jacob of Serugh, *On the Mother of God*, translated by Mary Hansbury.

About Saint Mary's argument with the angel, saying: How can this be for me, since I do not know a man?

This argument raised many questions for Saint Jacob of Serugh which he recorded in his homily and answered them briefly:

1. Did the angel Gabriel argue with the Lord saying: How is this possible?

❖ When I was sent to announce His gospel, I did not argue with Him, and what I heard from Him I told you about.

I did not ask Him several times (saying): How is this going to be? And when I did not dare to ask, I remained silent.¹

2. Is there a good argument and another that is harmful?

❖ See, O prudent one, there are useful inquiries, and there is a question that causes harm.

There are some who examine matters and are not reproached because they are sincere, and there are some who argue, and the argument leads to loss.

Among the distinguished: There are two sides to the word when it is studied, one studies it with a spirit of strife (argument), and the other studies it in a spirit of love.

The angel praised Mary's helpful inquiry, and slandered the harmful inquiry of Zachariah, the priest.

Mary asked and she was not reprimanded by the angel, because she wanted to learn and she did not ask to argue,

Zechariah, who asked in the holy of holies, was disparaged, and retribution was given to be silent because he was a skeptic.

¹ Jacob of Serugh, *Targama men Al-Suryania Ila Al-Arabeyya Wa Derasa Ala Myamer Al-Malfan Mar Ya'coub Al-Serugy (A Translation from Syriac to Arabic and Study on the Memre of the Doctor Mar Jacob Al-Serugy)*. Part One, trans. Behnam Sony (Baghdad, 2003), Homily 201 on The Nativity of our Redeemer in the Flesh.

Two presented one question to one teacher, and his response did not show a single point of view for both of them.

The watcher slandered the priest who asked: How is this possible? but gave the young woman a crown of interpretation without shaming her.¹

3. Are there examples in the Holy Scripture?

- ❖ Regarding Eve, lack of doubt brought her death because she believed (the serpent), and she was overcome because she did not dispute.

Zacharia the priest has sinned because he asked, at a time when questions are not permissible.

Mary inquired to keep research and discussion away from those who want to argue.

When Mary examined, she kept the bold ones from examining the matter, and by her inquiry, she silenced the arguments.

If she had not stirred up an argument with the watcher, the debate would arise in the world regarding her son, and if she was silent, she would not have heard ... The argument of sin would suffocate the whole world.

After the watcher interpreted the news, the dispute continued, and after the angel revealed the truth, the debate rages.²

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹ Jacob of Serugh, *Targama men Al-Suryania Ila Al-Arabeyya Wa Derasa Ala Myamer Al-Malfan Mar Ya'coub Al-Serugy (A Translation from Syriac to Arabic and Study on the Memre of the Doctor Mar Jacob Al-Serugy)*. Part One, trans. Behnam Sony (Baghdad, 2003), Homily 201 on The Nativity of our Redeemer in the Flesh.

² Jacob of Serugh, *Targama men Al-Suryania Ila Al-Arabeyya Wa Derasa Ala Myamer Al-Malfan Mar Ya'coub Al-Serugy (A Translation from Syriac to Arabic and Study on the Memre of the Doctor Mar Jacob Al-Serugy)*. Part One, trans. Behnam Sony (Baghdad, 2003), Homily 201 on The Nativity of our Redeemer in the Flesh.

Inspired by the feast of Annunciation

**With your annunciation we were comforted, O You
Who fills our hearts with joy!!**

❖ You sent the Archangel Gabriel to Saint Mary to herald the incarnation of your only Son in her.

Curses were removed from us, you gave us divine righteousness, and you granted us your Holy Spirit to take us to the heavenly places!

With your love for us, you became incarnate, you became human, and you gave us the spirit of sonship, so we can enjoy eternal life and heavenly glories.

With your cross you crushed the enemy of good, and you gave us the spirit of victory.

In a spirit of joy, Gabriel preached our virgin mother, so that Satan could no longer deceive us.

Eve opened the path for the deceptive serpent, and here the Virgin Mary offered her newborn; the Way of truth.

she is an everlasting virgin, and as the Mother of God, her heart expands with unique motherhood!

Grant me the virginity of heart, so that my heart widens, longing for the salvation of all mankind!



Saint Mary's conversation with the archangel encourages us on the correct theological path as we grow in the knowledge of the divine mysteries which we could have never spoken about or examined before. Archangel Gabriel told Saint Mary, "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 1:35) This conversation is not only the key for humanity's theological knowledge but also for the angels.

