



Opening Prayer for Lent

Light a candle, observe a *minute of silence* then recite together:

**Loving and Merciful God,
You give us these Holy
Days of Lent for our
conversion, in order to
prepare for your
Resurrection.**

**Help us to recognize your
call each day so that we
may one day rise to new
life.**

**Keep us close to you and
each other as we share
faith, serve those in need
and worship you in Spirit
and in Truth.
-AMEN**

Seasons of Faith

March 25, 2017 ❖ The Annunciation of the Lord 📖 Isaiah 7:10-14, 8-10, Hebrews 10:4-10, Luke 1:26-38

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In the midst of the soul searching, praying, and reordering of priorities that are part of Lent for me, reflecting upon the Annunciation and the Incarnation give me a boost of energy and encouragement.

My first encounter with the Annunciation of the Lord was in my Children's Bible with the big, colorful illustrations. I was quite taken with the angelic looking Mary and I marveled at how lucky she was to be the mother of Jesus. Years later as I read this passage I tried to put myself in Mary's place. Wasn't she scared? Didn't she wonder what everyone would think of her, pregnant with no husband? Didn't she have doubts? Could she actually embrace the idea of giving birth to and raising the Son of God?! What incredible faith she demonstrated to be so accepting and obedient!

When Gabriel made his announcement to Mary he was telling her of the Incarnation. Yes, her life would become more complicated and there would be pain as well as joy for her, but she must have been encouraged. After all,

the Incarnation is the ultimate expression of God's willingness to be with us. Mary had the grace to accept the will of God because her faith was so strong. Can I be a little more successful today at living the words of the Morning Prayer? Can I offer up all my prayers, works, joys, and sufferings to God as Mary did? Will today be a day when I live in the present and try to work with God, or will I be preoccupied with resentments, frustrations, and selfishness?

I remember a phrase from a literature class I once took. We were told that when reading fiction we must have a 'willing suspension of disbelief.' In other words, we have to accept the author's premises and assumptions and willingly surrender to the reality he creates. This reminds me of Mary's reaction to Gabriel's announcement. Whatever skepticism she might have been tempted to feel was suspended. The whole idea of Incarnation demanded it of her as it does of us. Despite the fears and struggles we face in our lives we are called to a continuing conversion, to a renewing and a deepening of our trust in God. May we respond as Mary did. May we have the grace to live and believe that God is with us. Emmanuel!



Questions for Sharing

1. **For Isaiah:** What are some signs that the Lord has given you recently to let you know that He is with you?
2. **For Hebrews:** Through the offering of the Body of Jesus, we are consecrated. What does this offering mean to you in your life? In what ways do you give thanks for this sacrifice?
3. **For Luke:** Mary tells the Lord, "May it be done to me according to your Word." Share a time you allowed the Lord's will to lead you to new places, when you said "yes" to something unexpected. What was the outcome?
4. **For the reflection:** What thoughts or feelings come to mind when you think of Mary in the Annunciation? In what ways does her "yes" inspire you?

Walking the Talk

Trusting and saying "Yes" to the Lord

In today's Gospel when we hear how Mary gave her full and knowing consent to the angel of the Lord, she gives us the paradigm of how a human person embraces divine will. She deposited all of her trust in God, willingly and without any reservation, even though she might have or might not have been fully aware of the difficulties and consequences of her Yes! C. S. Lewis writes in *The Screwtape Letters*, "God does not want slaves to do His bidding under His command, but sons and daughters who willingly and joyfully join in His work". This week:

- Spend some time doing an activity you find difficult to perform. For example, visit a person in the hospital, make amends to someone you have a conflict with. Share with someone if you willingly or grudgingly performed this activity or refused to accept it all.

Committed to New Life

Welcoming Others in their Story

"For us hospitality is core to everything we do in our accompaniment, service and advocacy. It is about how we welcome the human person. From this encounter we understand how best to serve them. Listening, developing relationships, charity and mercy are at the heart of hospitality". Pope Francis

- This week reach out to people in your neighborhood or parish community or in your family whom you know are going through difficult times. Offer them compassion in real tangible ways. Invite them to share a cup of coffee with you and provide for them the space to share some of their frustration.
- In this Lenten Season, be more intentional in giving your donations to the rice bowl to help feed the hungry and assist the efforts of Catholic Relief Services (CRS) to respond to the needs of people in the diocese and around the world.



Strength for the Journey

Seasonal Rituals To Celebrate Faith and Life

Embracing Our Diversity

(For the prayer center, include a cross, a bible and a candle. You may also include a purple tablecloth, some rocks or a dry branch to observe the Lenten Time. Ask each person to bring an image or item that identifies with their culture. Have them place the item on the prayer center)



Leader: We gather today to recognize that we are all made special in God's image and resemblance. We all possess unique qualities and talents that make our church rich in diversity. May we always embrace and recognize our differences as blessings not obstacles.

All: Lord, help us to work towards unity in our diversity so that Your church will walk together towards You in harmony. Encourage us to learn from one another and guide us to grow together in faith.

(Ask each participant to approach the prayer center and one by one, share a bit about their image or item that they brought. They can share why this item is special to them and what about their culture it represents. After each person has shared, conclude with the following unity prayer.)

Eternal Father,
we praise you for sending your Son
to be one of us and to save us.
Look upon your people with mercy,
for we are divided in so many ways,
and give us the Spirit of Jesus to make us one in love.

We ask this gift, loving Father,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Taken from <http://www.catholic.org/prayers>