2025-12-21: 2nd Sunday of Kiahk - Lessons from St Mary

Background

The month of Kiahk is a month of preparation for the Feast of the Nativity, when we will receive the God Incarnate, the Lord Jesus Christ in the flesh. It is the beginning of the Liturgical Calendar and we start to read the Gospel accounts of the beginning of the Lord's life.

During the month of Kiahk, we are reading from Luke 1 - always four Sundays, so four divisions of the Chapter.

1. The Annunciation of the Birth of John the Baptist
2. The Annunciation of the Birth of the Lord Jesus Christ
3. The Visit of St Mary to St Elizabeth
4. The Birth and Circumcision of John the Baptist

Then on the 28th of Kiahk, the Paramoun Liturgy we will read the next part from Luke 2 - the Birth of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Then on the 29th of Kiahk, the Nativity Feast Liturgy we'll read the account of the Magi's visit to the Lord

And on the 30th of Kiahk, we will read the account of the Nativity of the Lord from the Gospel of John "And the word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory."

So these are the very important days to make sure I am in the Church - the four Sundays of Kiahk, the Paramoun of the Nativity and the Nativity Feast!

Introduction

Today we read the gospel of the Annunciation of the Birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. Archangel Gabriel appeared to St Mary and told her "Rejoice O Full of Grace, the Lord is with you! Blessed are you among women!"

St Mary, hearing this greeting, is troubled. What is this greeting? It has never been said to anyone before... Who am I to deserve it? So the angel said to her "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God." And then He told her that the Son of God would be born from her.

Her response: "How can this be, since I do not know a man?"

And he explained to her how the Trinity will work to bring about her pregnancy without losing her virginity.

So she answered "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word."

Who is this St Mary whom the angel calls "Full of Grace" and "Blessed among women" and "has found favor with God?" How does she deserve all of these titles and the many more titles that we give her in the Church? What is it that made her to be called these things?

We'll take four lessons from St Mary today for which she was worthy to be called "Full of Grace" and "Blessed"

Life of Humility

- It was necessary that the Lord would be born of a humble person, who could bear the glory
  - The glory of the Holy Spirit coming upon her
  - The glory of the birth of the Lord from her
  - The glory of all generations calling her blessed
  - The glory she would immediately face with St Elizabeth calling her "the mother of my Lord"
  - The glory of the angels that would appear around her
  - The glory of the Magi who would come and worship her baby Son
  - The glory of the miracles that would happen around her in every city she entered in the land of Egypt
  - In all of these, St Mary did not boast. In all of these, St Mary was humble.
- This is why God waited for her to be His Mother
  - Humility was manifest in her life
  - "Behold the maidservant of the Lord!" - I am your servant, I am your slave - let the Lord's will be done upon His servant
  - Then she immediately goes to serve St Elizabeth in her last three months of pregnancy. Although she is pregnant with the Lord of Glory, yet she goes to serve St Elizabeth.
  - We'll see in her praise next week that she says "He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant"
- The Lord seeks after those who are humble
  - "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6)
  - "But on this one I will look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word" (Isaiah 66:2)
  - "To the fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom, and before honor is humility" (Proverbs 15:33)
- My Life of Humility
  - Do I seek to be recognized for everything I do? Can I serve joyfully even if no one notices?
  - Do I say things like "do you know who I am?" Or "How can he treat me this way? Doesn't he know how long I have been here"

    - Can I accept correction without getting defensive? Without insulting the person in front of me? Without losing my temper or getting mad?
    - If I want to live a life of humility, I need to think of myself less

Life of Obedience & Abandon

- Arabic word 7ader
    - There is a word in Arabic, many of you know it - called 7ader. And it doesn't have a very good translation in English.
    - Like when someone asks you to do something, you might say 7ader and then do it... but what is that in English?
    - The word 7ader blends:
        - Presence
            - "I am here" - I am attentive and engaged, I understand what you are asking
        - Readiness
            - "I am ready to do what you asked" - I am not delaying, negotiating, half-committed. Say the word.
        - Obedience
            - "I place myself under your word" - I am not obeying forcefully, but I am submitting willingly
        - Consent
            - "I accept this freely" - Yes
    - Unfortunately, there isn't in English a word that mixes all of these meanings together, so we will be forced to use the Arabic word when talking about St Mary's obedience.
- St Mary's Obedience
    - St Mary was dedicated to the Temple at a very young age, she lived purely and saintly in the Temple
    - Then came the time when they told her to go out of the Temple... 7ader.
    - She wanted to live without marriage, but they told her to live under the guardianship of a man (that was the custom). 7ader.
    - She intended to live her life in virginity, without any plans to bring up a child - then the angel told her she will become a mother by the coming of the Holy Spirit upon her... "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." 7ader.
    - She was told to go to Egypt... 7ader.
    - Then after three years, we need to go back from Egypt... 7ader.
    - Actually, we aren't going back to Bethlehem, but we're going to go live in Nazareth... 7ader.
    - While her Son was on the Cross he gave her to St John to live with him... 7ader.
- The Lord desires those who obey
    - "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Samuel 15:22) - after King Saul offered a sacrifice, disobeying the Law of the Lord
    - "Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it" (Luke 11:28)

    - "If you diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God... all these blessings shall come upon you" (Deuteronomy 28)
- My Life of Obedience
    - When God's will is clear, do I delay? Or do I try to negotiate? Or I only obey if I understand?
    - How about my obedience to others - to the Church canons and practices and fasts? To my priests and my father of confession? Is my obedience conditional on comfort?
    - Do I say 7ader? Or if I don't speak Arabic... do I do 7ader?

Life of Prayer

- St Mary's Life of Prayer, Meditation and Silence
    - In the Temple, she learned the life of solitude and silence. She became preoccupied with prayer and meditation
    - She lived a life of prayer, hymns, reading the Scripture, recalling its verses, praying the Psalms
        - We'll see in the Gospel reading next week how St Mary's praise is 100% rooted in her knowledge of Scripture - taking from the Psalms, from the OT stories like Hannah's song, from an understanding of the history of the Lord's work with Israel, etc.
    - "She kept all these things and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19)
        - Silence & Meditation
- The Lord desires our stillness
    - "She kept all these things and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19)
    - "Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10)
    - "Let your words be few" (Ecclesiastes 5:2)
- My Life of Prayer and Contemplation
    - Silence is uncomfortable - but I need a period of silence every day. Even just 5 minutes. No phones/screens, just silence.
    - Let me be serious with my spiritual canon - Abouna gave me a canon, let me do it and be committed to doing it.
    - And when I pray - it's not about quantity, but about quality. Let me pray one Psalm slowly, not rushed, meditating on its words. It's better than rushing through 100 psalms.

Life of Purity

- St Mary lived a life of purity and a life of virginity
    - Her intention in her life was to live a life of virginity
    - When the angel told her that she will give birth, she said "How can this be, since I do not know a man?"
    - Her question was not "When will this be?" because in her mind, she does not know a man, neither will she ever know a man. Her question is about the manner of the pregnancy, not about the possibility.
    - She lived in a time when EVERYONE her age would be given to marriage and having as many children as possible, in hopes of bringing about the Messiah. But she chose

the pure life of Virginity.
    - St Mary's purity was not just physical, but also a purity of thoughts, purity of desires
- The Lord desires our purity
    - "Blessed are the pure in heart" (Matthew 5:8)
    - "I will set nothing wicked before my eyes" (Psalm 101:3)
    - "Flee youthful lusts" (2 Timothy 2:22)
    - "bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5)
- My Life of Purity
    - This is one of the biggest challenges of our day - the life of purity. Especially for our youth.
    - Everything is accessible.
    - How can I keep my senses pure?
        - The world around me is using language I shouldn't hear.
        - All of the media around me is using images I shouldn't see - even advertisements, movies, shows.
        - The culture I live in approves of (and even tries to encourage) sexual immorality.
        - Even the people around me don't have a sense of modesty - walking around with whatever revealing or tight clothes
        - Social Media makes everyone and everything accessible
        - Everything is intimate and everyone is intimate
            - HGBB Face of a Person
        - On top of that, the normalization of consuming alcohol, marijuana, vaping, sports gambling and other gambling
    - How?
        - Guard my senses
            - What I watch shapes my imagination
            - What I hear shapes my thoughts
            - Don't scroll when you're tired or bored
            - Don't watch alone, but watch in the living room around your family - your parents, your wife, your children
        - Learn to flee, not to argue
            - Close the app
            - Leave the room
            - Change the environment
            - Hang out with other people
        - Take every thought into captivity
            - Don't let a thought pass by - a thought of lust, a thought of desire, a thought of anger, a thought of revenge, etc. without questioning it.
            - Is this thought from God?
            - Is this thought for peace?
            - Is this thought good?
        - Don't Isolate
            - Being alone feeds impurity
                - Being alone in my room is not good

        - Being away from the rest of the faithful is not good
    - Specifically, don't isolate from your Church Community
        - I hear people say "the friends at school do the same things as the friends at church" - okay but the friends at school are STRUGGLING. They are trying to stop. They are stopping. They are growing. They are repenting. Stick to them.
        - Don't leave your church community, because the devil will take advantage of this to destroy your purity.
- Replace, don't remove
    - If I try to just remove bad habits, then I will have lots of idle time and different bad habits will form.
    - Instead, I need to REPLACE bad habits with good ones.
    - When a thought comes to smoke or drink or vape, Jesus prayer. Say the name of the Lord Jesus over and over again.
    - When a thought comes to open an app or a website, to see something impure or even just to scroll, Bible App.
    - When a thought comes that I am bored, Hobby!

Conclusion

St Mary was not chosen randomly to carry the Lord and bring about our salvation. But in the fullness of time, the Lord chose her because of her humility, her obedience, her purity and her life of prayer.

May the Lord grant us to learn these lessons from St Mary and to grow in grace through her intercessions. Glory be to God, forever. Amen.

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