

THE ARCHANGEL GABRIEL

The name Gabriel seems to be composed of the Hebrew words, <geber>: man, and <'el>: God. It means, therefore, <Man of God>, or, <Strength of God.>

Practically all the missions and manifestations of this Archangel are closely connected with the coming of the Messiah. The most accurate prophecy regarding the time of the coming of Christ was made by Saint Gabriel through the prophet Daniel.



Immediately before the coming of Christ we meet the Archangel Gabriel in the temple of Jerusalem, announcing to Zachary the birth of a son, John the Baptist, the precursor of Christ: "I am Gabriel, who stand before God, and am sent to speak to thee, and to bring thee these good tidings."

The greatest and by far the most joyful message ever committed to an Angel from the beginning of time, was the one brought by the Archangel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary, announcing to her the Incarnation of the Word of God and the birth of Christ, the Savior of mankind. The simplicity and heavenly grandeur of this message, as related to us by her who was the only witness to Gabriel's good tidings, should be read in full in order to understand the sublime and delicate mission of Gabriel in the work of human redemption.

It is the first time that a prince of the court of heaven greets an earthly child of God, a young woman, with a deference and respect a prince would show to his Queen. That Angel's flight to the earth marked the dawn of a new day, the beginning of a new covenant, the fulfillment of God's promises to His people: The Angel Gabriel was sent from God into a city of Galilee, called Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man, whose name was Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary."

Heavenly wisdom, tact, adroitness are evident in Gabriel's conversation with the Virgin Mary: "The Angel being come in said unto her: Hail, full of grace, the Lord

is with thee." Gabriel must overcome Mary's reaction of surprise at both his appearance and especially at his "manner of salutation." He has to prepare and dispose her pure virginal mind to the idea of maternity, and obtain her consent to become the mother of the Son of God. Gabriel nobly fulfills this task: "Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God." He calls her by her own name in order to inspire confidence and to show affection and solicitude in her perturbation. The great message is presented to her as a decree of the Most High God, a thing ordained in the eternal decree of the Incarnation, predicted centuries before by the prophets, and announced now to her as an event of imminent occurrence depending on her consent: "Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of David his father and he shall reign in the house of Jacob forever. And of his kingdom there shall be no end." From these words of the Angel, it became very evident to Mary that her son was to be the promised Messiah the Son of David. But she did not know how to reconcile her vow of virginity with the promised motherhood, hence her question: "How shall this be done, because I know not man." Gabriel's reply shows that God wanted to respect Mary's vow of virginity and thus make her a mother without a human father, in a unique and miraculous way: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee."

As a last word of encouragement and, at the same time, gratifying information, the Archangel reveals to Mary that her elderly and barren cousin Elizabeth is now an expectant mother in her sixth month of pregnancy. This final argument was offered in order "to prove that nothing can be impossible with God." Mary, unshaken in her profound humility, replied: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word." This reply was Mary's consent, a consent awaited by heaven and earth. The Archangel Gabriel departed from Mary to bring to all the Angels the glorious tidings of the Incarnation of the Word.

It seems very probable that Gabriel, the Archangel of the Annunciation, was given special charge of the Holy Family of Nazareth. He was probably the Angel who brought "good tidings of great joy" to the shepherds "keeping night watches over their flock," the night that Christ was born of the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem. We notice, on this occasion, the same procedure of first assuaging fear and surprise, as had been the case at Mary's Annunciation by Gabriel: "Fear not, for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy.... This day is born to you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David." Who else could be the messenger of such good tidings, but he who had promised them through the prophet Daniel, and announced them to Mary, Gabriel the Archangel?

Having delivered the joyful message, the Archangel is joined suddenly by a vast multitude of the heavenly hosts, singing for the first time in this valley of tears the

canticle of the celestial Zion. It was fitting that the Archangel of Redemption should intone the canticle of human redemption: "Suddenly there was with the Angel a multitude of the heavenly army, praising God, and saying: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will."

Gabriel's duties towards the Messiah did not come to an end with his birth. Gabriel was probably the Angel who "appeared in sleep to Joseph," first in Bethlehem when he warned him saying: "Arise, and take the child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and stay there until I shall tell you. For it will come to pass that Herod will seek the child to destroy him." After the death of Herod the Angel appeared to Joseph again in Egypt to tell him to bring the child and his mother back into the land of Israel.

Gabriel who is "the strength of God" must have been the Angel mentioned by Saint Luke, in his narrative of Christ's agony in the garden: "And there appeared to him an Angel from heaven, strengthening him." It was fitting that the Angel who had witnessed the Savior's agony, and who had announced His coming to both the Old and New Testament, should also be the first to announce to the world the Savior's Resurrection, His triumph over sin and death on Easter morning: "An Angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and coming rolled back the stone, and sat upon it. And his countenance was as lightning, and his raiment as snow."

It is very probable that the Archangel Gabriel is meant when Saint Paul speaks of the second coming of Christ at the end of the world, when Saint Michael's struggle with Satan shall be over, and when all the physical and spiritual remedies of Saint Raphael are needed no more. It would seem that of the three Archangels known to us, Saint Gabriel is the one who with a mighty voice will call the dead to life and to judgment: "The Lord himself shall come down from heaven with commandment, and with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead who are in Christ shall rise first." The voice of the Archangel and the trumpet of God seem to be the same thing, having the purpose to convey the divine command to the dead to rise again by the power of the Almighty God. The resurrection of "the dead who are in Christ" is the harvest, the gathering of the fruits of Redemption. Gabriel, who helped along during the long day of man's life on earth, in preparing man for the work of Redemption by the Messiah would seem to be the first among the Angels who are sent out to gather the elect from the four corners of the earth.

...from EWTN