

FEAST OF THE ANNUNCIATION

The feast of the Annunciation, the day on which our salvation begins, is so important that in the Byzantine Churches, it is never moved, no matter what day on which it falls, even on Good Friday. Why? Because the date of the Incarnation supersedes everything, this feast must be observed. If it falls on Good Friday, then the joyful Annunciation Liturgy is celebrated in the morning, with bright colors per usual. Then the rest of the day is given over to the sorrowful passion of Our Lord.

The Archangel is usually shown with his feet spread apart as if he is running to share the good news with Mary. His vestments can be shown flowing behind him. In his left hand is a staff, the symbol of a messenger in ancient Greece. His right hand is extended toward Mary as he delivers the message and announces the blessing bestowed upon her by God.

On the right side of the icon the Virgin either sits on an elevated seat, or stands erect ready to receive the message. Either way indicates that, as the Mother of God, she is “*more honorable than the cherubim, and beyond compare more glorious than the seraphim, who a virgin gave birth to God the Word.*” In her left hand she holds a spindle of scarlet yarn, which depicts the task she was assigned of preparing the purple and scarlet material to be used in making the veil for the Temple in Jerusalem. Her right hand is raised in a gesture of acceptance in response to Gabriel’s message. Her posture expresses willing cooperation with God’s plan of salvation. Mary’s garments also have the three stars commonly used to represent her ever-virginity: before, during, and after the birth of Christ.

At the top of the icon, the segment of a circle represents the divine realm, from which three rays emerge. This demonstrates the action of the Holy Spirit coming upon her from the Trinity. In other depictions of the same icon, Christ Himself – as a man – is shown in this semi-circle. Some icons show the Infant Jesus taking shape in her womb, surrounded with His unique halo, showing that He is the God-Man from the beginning, and so Mary is truly the Theotokos, The Bearer of God. The halo reads “I am that I am”, the name God gave in answer to Moses’ question “Who are you?”

The Annunciation icon marks the crowning of our salvation and the revelation of the mystery before all ages. For the Son of God becomes the son of the Virgin and Gabriel proclaims to the ever-virgin Mary:

“Hail, O full of grace, the Lord is with you.”