

JOHN PAUL II



Mother
of the
Redeemer
ANNIVERSARY
EDITION

With Commentary by M. Jean Frisk

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Contents

Preface	v
Topical Outline	xi



Introduction	1
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PART I

Mary in the Mystery of Christ	11
<i>Full of grace</i>	11
<i>Blessed is she who believed</i>	18
<i>Behold your mother</i>	30

PART II

The Mother of God at the Center of the Pilgrim Church	45
<i>The Church, the People of God present in all the nations of the earth</i>	45
<i>The Church's journey and the unity of all Christians</i>	54
<i>The "Magnificat" of the pilgrim Church</i>	60

PART III

Maternal Mediation	69
<i>Mary, the Handmaid of the Lord</i>	69
<i>Mary in the life of the Church and of every Christian</i>	77
<i>The meaning of the Marian Year</i>	87
Conclusion	95
<i>The wonder of Mary's divine motherhood</i>	95
<i>Mary and the transformation of humanity</i>	96
Notes	99

Preface

Twenty-five years later, I find myself rereading a letter from a shepherd to his beloved!

Were his words read, remembered, heeded?

How were the Church and the lives of its members influenced by this letter?

Obviously, openly, John Paul II loved Mary—Mother of his people, protector, personal, intimate, confidant—who was and is actively present among us, and who had a significant role in salvation history. The wall outside his Vatican window was graced with her image, a crowned Mary, a gentle, sweet, western image of Mary. But no matter when or how she is presented to us, it's never Mary without her Divine Son!

When you love the shepherd, you tend to want to love who and what the shepherd loves. This letter awakened the curious and resonated in some corners.

During the leadership of John Paul II, seldom did he publish a writing, have an audience, or visit a country without specifically honoring the Mother of God—even if simply using a closing *pro forma* statement. Study of those apparently routine closings shows trends or issues dear to his heart at the time—not in the sense of an emotional endearment, but of a

conscious point of reference for an educational goal as if to say: “Think about this!” So, what sort of legacy did Pope John Paul II leave with this particular document: *Redemptoris Mater*? Who read it? Who listened?

The document was published on the feast of the Annunciation, March 25, 1987, to announce the long-term preparation for the turning millennium. The Redeemer’s 2000th birthday, born among us of a woman who freely accepted him, would begin with a year dedicated to his mother, to her birth, even if unknown in the annals of history. We were asked to study Mary’s faith, to look at her role, and to imitate her.

Benedict XVI, John Paul’s successor, adds an even stronger note when he directs the attention back to us. Her giftedness was not for Jesus alone, but also for us, just as our gifts are meant for one another. Benedict expresses it this way:

Mary’s birth constitutes a fundamental stage for the Family of Nazareth, cradle of our redemption, an event that regards each one of us, because every gift that God has granted to her, the Mother, he has granted thinking also of each one of us, her children.*

One year after *Redemptoris Mater* was published, the Vatican’s Congregation for Catholic Education published *The Virgin Mary in Intellectual and Spiritual Formation*. In terms of research and teaching, this document analyzed *Lumen Gentium*’s chapter 8 (the longest official Marian document

* Benedict XVI, Angelus Address at the Shrine of Bonaria in Cagliari, Sardinia, September 7, 2008.

ever published by a Council of the Catholic Church) and the post-conciliar documents focused on Mary,** specifically *Redemptoris Mater*. Clearly, the Congregation tried to implement a follow-up. It insisted on the *necessity* of furnishing seminarians and students of all centers of ecclesiastical studies with Mariological formation that embraces study, devotion, and lifestyle. These teachers of theology were now required to study about Mary, her person, and her active role in salvation history. They are to teach the faithful these truths. Honoring Mary's place as inseparable from Christ's Incarnation was to be considered essential to Church teaching. This was not to be left to personal choice, devotion, or interest. Learning about Mary's person and role is required. Teachers must exhibit the following qualities:

- a. *A complete and exact knowledge* of the doctrine of the Church about the Virgin Mary, which enables them to distinguish between true and false devotion, and to distinguish authentic doctrine from its deformations arising from excess or neglect, and, above all, which discloses to them the way to understand and to contemplate the supreme beauty of the glorious Mother of Christ
- b. *An authentic love* for the Mother of the Savior and Mother of mankind, which expresses itself in genuine forms of devotion and is led to "the imitation of her virtues" (LG, 67), above all to a decisive commitment to live according to the commandments of God and to do his will (cf. Mt 7:21; Jn 15:14).

** See especially, Paul VI, *Signum Magnum* and *Marialis Cultus*.

- c. The *capacity to communicate* such love to the Christian people through speech, writing, and example, so that their Marian piety may be promoted and cultivated.†

Did this happen? Admittedly, many of us are averse to the word *must*. *Must* study? *Must* love? *Must* communicate? What harried and over-extended bishop, priest, or layperson has time to do more than quickly scan so much written material?

Nonetheless, we do find traces, expressions, and ways of thinking that have their roots in the hearts of outstanding leaders who loved Mary. We remember the quiet work of those who prepared the draft of *Lumen Gentium's* chapter 8, a summation of years of studied wisdom, underscored by the studies from the French Mariological Society with the desire to see Mary deeply linked with the liturgy. Chapter 8 presents Mary as the summation of what it means to be a Church fully centered on Christ.

Then in the face of apparent controversies, Paul VI courageously gave Mary the title “Mother of the Church.” We need to keep in mind that bishops the world over did not dismiss Mary’s importance at the council. The questions debated about her largely centered on two points of view: Mary is exalted, precious, and important. Shouldn’t she be worthy of her own specific document acknowledging this? The other perspective asked us to see her as a member of the Church, one of us, on our level, an example of who we should be. The vote won out

† This translation taken from *Mother of Christ, Mother of the Church: Document on the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2001), 356.

for the second choice. For the Pope to then give her yet another title of honor among so many others, he was essentially saying: “Yes, she is truly one of us and our example, but she is also our mother with a mother’s duty and right to continue caring for us and educating us—a mother who never forgets us and walks with us—her children—on our journey.” As John Paul II tells us in regard to Mary’s role in the Church: “Knowledge of the true Catholic doctrine regarding the Blessed Virgin Mary will always be a key to the exact understanding of the mystery of Christ and of the Church. . . . [I]n her new motherhood in the Spirit, Mary embraces each and every one *in* the Church, and embraces each and every one *through* the Church. In this sense Mary, Mother of the Church, is also the Church’s model.”[‡]

Today we are familiar with terms used in the encyclical, like Mary’s active presence, Mary as Christ’s first follower, his *first* disciple, Mary our forerunner and sister in faith, Mary’s place in the Communion of Saints. But, perhaps one of the most subtle influences has to do with ecumenism. Through *Redemptoris Mater* we were challenged to think about Mary in ways we could imitate in our daily lives. At the time, these were new ideas for the lay faithful.

Admittedly in pre-Vatican II times, for various reasons including fear of losing authenticity and identity, the Catholic Church seldom spoke in genuine ecumenical terms—at least for the people in the pews. The Polish pope, John Paul II, shared the longing of John XIII who heeded the Spirit’s

[‡] See p. 86.

gentle call to look East and seek commonalities—to see Mary as love’s conduit of unity.

Today, we dare to dialogue. We look at Eastern rituals and art with growing respect, and we are not afraid to learn of differences that can enrich, not endanger, our steadfast common faith in the Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Ecumenism for John Paul II meant “that *in the presence of the Mother of Christ we feel that we are true brothers and sisters* within that messianic People, which is called to be the one family of God on earth (50).”*

Accept this invitation to read or re-read, to ponder, to pray, and to act in the light of Blessed John Paul II’s holy wisdom.

* Ibid, 308.

Topical Outline

INTRODUCTION

Mary's place in the plan of salvation

Mary's pilgrimage of faith (1–2)

The Jubilee of the year 2000 (3)

Marian teaching of Vatican II (4–5)

Mary as the eschatological fulfillment of the Church (6)

PART I: MARY IN THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST

*Full of grace: Mary's place in the Father's plan
of salvation* (7)

Meaning of Mary's name as "full of grace" (8)

Mary's election as the Mother of the Son of God (9)

Mary's Immaculate Conception (10)

The proto-evangelium (11)

Blessed is she who believed

Mary's visit to Elizabeth and its meaning (12)

*Mary's response of faith at the annunciation
and beyond* (13–15)

Simeon's words to Mary: a second annunciation (16)

Mary's faith during the hidden life at Nazareth (17)

The deepest kenosis of faith: Calvary (18)

The blessing of faith and the biblical "beginning":

Eve-Mary (19)

Behold your mother

The spiritual dimension of motherhood (20)

The significance of Cana and Mary's mediation (21)

Vatican II's teaching on Mary's mediation (22)

The significance of Calvary and Mary's motherhood (23)

Mary's maternal presence in the Church (24)

PART II: THE MOTHER OF GOD AT THE CENTER OF THE PILGRIM CHURCH

The Church, the People of God present in all nations

The Church as the pilgrim people of God (25)

Mary and the Church's journey of faith (26–27)

Mary's presence in the Church's mission (28)

The Church's journey and the unity of all Christians

*Ecumenism and the Churches and ecclesial communities
of the West* (29–30)

The ancient Churches of the East (31–32)

Icons of Mary and traditions of East and West (33–34)

The Magnificat of the pilgrim Church

The Church lives Mary's Magnificat (35)

The Magnificat as Mary's response of faith (36)

Love for the poor (37)

PART III: MATERNAL MEDIATION

Mary, the handmaid of the Lord

*The unique mediation of Christ and Mary's
maternal sharing in it* (38)

The relation of Mary's virginity and her motherhood (39)

*Mary's mediation as a unique association with
the work of Christ* (39)

The universal dimension of Mary's maternal mediation (40)

*The Assumption and the eschatological nature
of Mary's mediation* (41)

Mary in the life of the Church and of every Christian

Mary as a figure of the Church (42)

The Church as virgin and mother (43)

Mary's motherhood in the order of grace (44)

The Marian dimension of discipleship (45)

Mary and the vocation of woman (46)

Mary as Mother of the Church (47)

The meaning of the Marian Year

*Marian spirituality and devotion in the light
of Vatican II* (48)

Mary precedes the Church's journey of faith (49)

Hoped-for unity with the Eastern Churches (50)

CONCLUSION

The wonder of Mary's divine motherhood (51)

Mary and the transformation of humanity (52)

PART I

Mary in the Mystery of Christ

Full of grace

7. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (Eph 1:3). These words of the *Letter to the Ephesians* reveal the eternal design of God the Father, his plan of man’s salvation in Christ. It is a universal plan, which concerns all men and women created in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen 1:26). Just as all are included in the creative work of God “in the beginning,” so all are eternally included in the divine plan of salvation, which is to be completely revealed, in the “fullness of time,” with the final coming of Christ. In fact, the God who is the “Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”—these are the next words of the same *Letter*—“*chose us in him before the foundation of the world*, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, which he freely bestowed on us in *the Beloved*. In

him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace” (Eph 1:4–7).

The divine plan of salvation—which was fully revealed to us with the coming of Christ—is eternal. And according to the teaching contained in the *Letter* just quoted and in other Pauline Letters (cf. Col 1:12–14; Rom 3:24; Gal 3:13; 2 Cor 5:18–29), it is also *eternally linked to Christ*. It includes everyone, but it reserves a special place for the “*woman*” who is the Mother of him to whom the Father has entrusted the work of salvation.¹⁹ As the Second Vatican Council says, “she is already prophetically foreshadowed in that promise made to our first parents after their fall into sin”—according to the *Book of Genesis* (cf. 3:15). “Likewise she is the Virgin who is to conceive and bear a son, whose name will be called Emmanuel”—according to the words of Isaiah (cf. 7:14).²⁰ In this way the Old Testament prepares that “fullness of time” when God “sent forth his Son, born of woman . . . so that we might receive adoption as sons.” The coming into the world of the Son of God is an event recorded in the first chapters of the Gospels according to Luke and Matthew.

8. *Mary is definitively introduced into the mystery of Christ through this event: the annunciation* by the angel. This takes place at Nazareth, within the concrete circumstances of the history of Israel, the people that first received God’s promises. The divine messenger says to the Virgin: “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you” (Lk 1:28). Mary “was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be” (Lk 1:29): what could those extraordinary

words mean, and in particular the expression “full of grace” (*kécharitôméné*)?²¹

If we wish to meditate together with Mary on these words, and especially on the expression “full of grace,” we can find a significant echo in the very passage from the *Letter to the Ephesians* quoted above. And if after the announcement of the heavenly messenger the Virgin of Nazareth is also called “blessed among women” (cf. Lk 1:42), it is because of that blessing with which “God the Father” has filled us “in the heavenly places, in Christ.” It is a *spiritual blessing* which is meant for all people and which bears in itself fullness and universality (“every blessing”). It flows from that love which, in the Holy Spirit, unites the consubstantial Son to the Father. At the same time, it is a blessing poured out through Jesus Christ upon human history until the end: upon all people. This blessing, however, refers *to Mary in a special and exceptional degree*: for she was greeted by Elizabeth as “blessed among women.”

The double greeting is due to the fact that in the soul of this “daughter of Zion” there is manifested, in a sense, all the “glory of grace,” that grace which “the Father . . . has given us in his beloved Son.” For the messenger greets Mary as “full of grace”; he calls her thus as if it were her real name. He does not call her by her proper earthly name: Miryam (= Mary), but *by this new name: “full of grace.”* What does this name mean? Why does the archangel address the Virgin of Nazareth in this way?

In the language of the Bible “grace” means a special gift, which according to the New Testament has its source

precisely in the Trinitarian life of God himself, God who is love (cf. 1 Jn 4:8). The fruit of this love is “*the election*” of which the *Letter to the Ephesians* speaks. On the part of God, this election is the eternal desire to save man through a sharing in his own life (cf. 2 Pt 1:4) in Christ: it is salvation through a sharing in supernatural life. The effect of this eternal gift, of this grace of man’s election by God, is like a *seed of holiness*, or a spring which rises in the soul as a gift from God himself, who through grace gives life and holiness to those who are chosen. In this way there is fulfilled, that is to say there comes about, that “blessing” of man “with every spiritual blessing,” that “being his adopted sons and daughters . . . in Christ,” in him who is eternally the “beloved Son” of the Father.

When we read that the messenger addresses Mary as “full of grace,” the Gospel context, which mingles revelations and ancient promises, enables us to understand that among all the “spiritual blessings in Christ” this is a special “blessing.” In the mystery of Christ she is *present* even “before the creation of the world,” as the one whom the Father “has chosen” as *Mother* of his Son in the Incarnation. And, what is more, together with the Father, the Son has chosen her, entrusting her eternally to the Spirit of holiness. In an entirely special and exceptional way Mary is united to Christ, and similarly she is *eternally loved in this “beloved Son,”* this Son who is of one being with the Father, in whom is concentrated all the “glory of grace.” At the same time, she is and remains perfectly open to this “gift from above” (cf. Jas 1:17). As the Council teaches, Mary “stands out among the poor and humble of the Lord, who confidently await and receive salvation from him.”²²

9. If the greeting and the name “full of grace” say all this, in the context of the angel’s announcement they refer first of all *to the election of Mary as Mother of the Son of God*. But at the same time the “fullness of grace” indicates all the supernatural munificence from which Mary benefits by being chosen and destined to be the Mother of Christ. If this election is fundamental for the accomplishment of God’s salvific designs for humanity, and if the eternal choice in Christ and the vocation to the dignity of adopted children is the destiny of everyone, then the election of Mary is wholly exceptional and unique. Hence also the singularity and uniqueness of her place in the mystery of Christ.

The divine messenger says to her: “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High” (Lk 1:30–32). And when the Virgin, disturbed by that extraordinary greeting, asks: “How shall this be, since I have no husband?” she receives from the angel the confirmation and explanation of the preceding words. Gabriel says to her: “*The Holy Spirit will come upon you*, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God” (Lk 1:35).

The annunciation, therefore, is the revelation of the mystery of the Incarnation at the very beginning of its fulfillment on earth. God’s salvific giving of himself and his life, in some way to all creation but directly to man, reaches *one of its high points in the mystery of the Incarnation*. This is indeed a high point among all the gifts of grace conferred in the history of

man and of the universe: Mary is “full of grace,” because it is precisely in her that the Incarnation of the Word, the hypostatic union of the Son of God with human nature, is accomplished and fulfilled. As the Council says, Mary is “the Mother of the Son of God. As a result she is also the favorite daughter of the Father and the temple of the Holy Spirit. Because of this gift of sublime grace, she far surpasses all other creatures, both in heaven and on earth.”²³

10. The *Letter to the Ephesians*, speaking of the “glory of grace” that “God, the Father . . . has bestowed on us in his beloved Son,” adds: “In him we have redemption through his blood” (Eph 1:7). According to the belief formulated in solemn documents of the Church, this “glory of grace” is manifested in the Mother of God through the fact that she has been “redeemed in a more sublime manner.”²⁴ By virtue of the richness of the grace of the beloved Son, by reason of the redemptive merits of him who willed to become her Son, Mary was *preserved from the inheritance of original sin*.²⁵ In this way, from the first moment of her conception—which is to say of her existence—she belonged to Christ, sharing in the salvific and sanctifying grace and in that love which has its beginning in the “Beloved,” the Son of the Eternal Father, who through the Incarnation became her own Son. Consequently, through the power of the Holy Spirit, in the order of grace, which is a participation in the divine nature, *Mary receives life from him to whom she herself*, in the order of earthly generation, *gave life* as a mother. The liturgy does not hesitate to call her “mother of her Creator”²⁶ and to hail her with the words which Dante Alighieri places on the lips of St. Bernard:

“daughter of your Son.”²⁷ And since Mary receives this “new life” with a fullness corresponding to the Son’s love for the Mother, and thus corresponding to the dignity of the divine motherhood, the angel at the annunciation calls her “full of grace.”

11. In the salvific design of the Most Holy Trinity, the mystery of the Incarnation constitutes the superabundant *fulfillment of the promise* made by God to man *after original sin*, after that first sin whose effects oppress the whole earthly history of man (cf. Gen 3:15). And so, there comes into the world a Son, “the seed of the woman” who will crush the evil of sin in its very origins: “he will crush the head of the serpent.” As we see from the words of the Proto-gospel, the victory of the woman’s Son will not take place without a hard struggle, a struggle that is to extend through the whole of human history. The “enmity,” foretold at the beginning, is confirmed in the Apocalypse (the book of the final events of the Church and the world), in which there recurs the sign of the “woman,” this time “clothed with the sun” (Rev 12:1).

Mary, Mother of the incarnate Word, is placed *at the very center of that enmity*, that struggle which accompanies the history of humanity on earth and the history of salvation itself. In this central place, she who belongs to the “weak and poor of the Lord” bears in herself, like no other member of the human race, that “glory of grace” which the Father “has bestowed on us in his beloved Son,” and this *grace determines the extraordinary greatness and beauty* of her whole being. Mary thus remains before God, and also before the whole of humanity, as the unchangeable and inviolable sign of God’s election, spoken of

in Paul's letter: "in Christ . . . he chose us . . . before the foundation of the world . . . he destined us . . . to be his sons" (Eph 1:4, 5). This election is more powerful than any experience of evil and sin, than all that "enmity" which marks the history of man. In this history Mary remains a sign of sure hope.

Blessed is she who believed

12. Immediately after the narration of the annunciation, the Evangelist Luke guides us in the footsteps of the Virgin of Nazareth toward "a city of Judah" (Lk 1:39). According to scholars this city would be the modern Ain Karim, situated in the mountains, not far from Jerusalem. Mary arrived there "in haste," to visit *Elizabeth* her kinswoman. The reason for her visit is also to be found in the fact that at the annunciation Gabriel had made special mention of Elizabeth, who in her old age had conceived a son by her husband Zechariah, through the power of God: "Your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. *For with God nothing will be impossible*" (Lk 1:36–37). The divine messenger had spoken of what had been accomplished in Elizabeth in order to answer Mary's question. "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" (Lk 1:34). It is to come to pass precisely through the "power of the Most High," just as it happened in the case of Elizabeth, and even more so.

Moved by charity, therefore, Mary goes to the house of her kinswoman. When Mary enters, Elizabeth replies to her greeting and feels the child leap in her womb, and being "filled

with the Holy Spirit” she *greet*s Mary with a loud cry: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!” (cf. Lk 1:40–42). Elizabeth’s exclamation or acclamation was subsequently to become part of the *Hail Mary*, as a continuation of the angel’s greeting, thus becoming one of the Church’s most frequently used prayers. But still more significant are the words of Elizabeth in the question which follows: “And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” (Lk 1:43). Elizabeth bears witness to Mary: she recognizes and proclaims that before her stands the Mother of the Lord, the Mother of the messiah. The son whom Elizabeth is carrying in her womb also shares in this witness: “The babe in my womb leaped for joy” (Lk 1:44). This child is the future John the Baptist, who at the Jordan will point out Jesus as the messiah.

While every word of Elizabeth’s greeting is filled with meaning, her final words would seem to have *fundamental importance*: “And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord” (Lk 1:45).²⁸ These words can be linked with the title “full of grace” of the angel’s greeting. Both of these texts reveal an essential Mariological content, namely the truth about Mary, who has become really present in the mystery of Christ precisely because she “has believed.” The *fullness of grace* announced by the angel means the gift of God himself. *Mary’s faith*, proclaimed by Elizabeth at the visitation, indicates *how* the Virgin of Nazareth *responded to this gift*.

13. As the Council teaches, “The obedience of faith’ (Rom 16:26; cf. Rom 1:5; 2 Cor 10:5–6) must be given to God who

reveals, an obedience by which man entrusts his whole self freely to God.”²⁹ This description of faith found perfect realization in Mary. The “decisive” moment was the annunciation, and the very words of Elizabeth: “And blessed is she who believed” refer primarily to that very moment.³⁰

Indeed, at the annunciation Mary entrusted herself to God completely, with the “full submission of intellect and will,” manifesting “the obedience of faith” to him who spoke to her through his messenger.³¹ She responded, therefore, *with all her human and feminine “I,”* and this response of faith included both perfect cooperation with “the grace of God that precedes and assists” and perfect openness to the action of the Holy Spirit, who “constantly brings faith to completion by his gifts.”³²

The word of the living God, announced to Mary by the angel, referred to her: “And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son” (Lk 1:31). By accepting this announcement, Mary was to become the “Mother of the Lord,” and the divine mystery of the Incarnation was to be accomplished in her: “The Father of mercies willed that the consent of the predestined Mother should precede the Incarnation.”³³ And Mary gives this consent, after she has heard everything the messenger has to say. She says: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38). This *fiat* of Mary—“let it be to me”—was decisive, on the human level, for the accomplishment of the divine mystery. There is a complete harmony with the words of the Son, who, according to the *Letter to the Hebrews*, says to the Father as he comes into the world: “Sacrifices and offering you have not

desired, but *a body you have prepared for me*. . . . Lo, I have come to do your will, O God” (Heb 10:5–7). The mystery of the Incarnation was accomplished when Mary uttered her *fiat*: “Let it be to me according to your word,” which made possible, as far as it depended upon her in the divine plan, the granting of her Son’s desire.

Mary uttered this *fiat in faith*. In faith she entrusted herself to God without reserve and “devoted herself totally as the handmaid of the Lord to the person and work of her Son.”³⁴ And as the Fathers of the Church teach—she conceived this Son in her mind before she conceived him in her womb: precisely in faith!³⁵ Rightly, therefore, does Elizabeth praise Mary: “And blessed is she who believed *that there would be a fulfillment* of what was spoken to her from the Lord.” These words have already been fulfilled: Mary of Nazareth presents herself at the threshold of Elizabeth and Zechariah’s house as the Mother of the Son of God. This is Elizabeth’s joyful discovery: “The mother of my Lord comes to me”!

14. Mary’s faith can also be *compared to that of Abraham*, whom St. Paul calls “our father in faith” (cf. Rom 4:12). In the salvific economy of God’s revelation, Abraham’s faith constitutes the beginning of the Old Covenant; Mary’s faith at the annunciation inaugurates the New Covenant. Just as Abraham “*in hope believed against hope*, that he should become the father of many nations” (cf. Rom 4:18), so Mary, at the annunciation, having professed her virginity (“How shall this be, since I have no husband?”) *believed* that through the power of the Most High, by the power of the Holy Spirit, she would become the Mother of God’s Son in accordance with the

angel's revelation: "The child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God" (Lk 1:35).

However, Elizabeth's words "And blessed is she who believed" do not apply only to that particular moment of the annunciation. Certainly the annunciation is the culminating moment of Mary's faith in her awaiting of Christ, but it is also the point of departure from which her whole "journey toward God" begins, her whole pilgrimage of faith. And on this road, in an eminent and truly heroic manner—indeed with an ever greater heroism of faith—the "obedience" which she professes to the word of divine revelation will be fulfilled. Mary's "obedience of faith" during the whole of her pilgrimage will show surprising similarities to the faith of Abraham. Just like the patriarch of the People of God, so too Mary, during the pilgrimage of her filial and maternal *fiat*, "in hope believed against hope." Especially during certain stages of this journey the blessing granted to her "who believed" will be revealed with particular vividness. To believe means "to abandon oneself" to the truth of the word of the living God, knowing and humbly recognizing "how unsearchable are his judgments and how *inscrutable his ways*" (Rom 11:33). Mary, who by the eternal will of the Most High stands, one may say, at the very center of those "inscrutable ways" and "unsearchable judgments" of God, conforms herself to them in the dim light of faith, accepting fully and with a ready heart everything that is decreed in the divine plan.

15. When at the annunciation Mary hears of the Son whose Mother she is to become and to whom "she will give the name Jesus" (= Savior), she also learns that "the Lord God

will give to him the throne of his father David,” and that “he will reign over the house of Jacob forever and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Lk 1:32–33). The hope of the whole of Israel was directed toward this. The promised messiah is to be “great,” and the heavenly messenger also announces that “*he will be great*”—great both by bearing the name of *Son of the Most High* and by the fact that he is to assume the *inheritance of David*. He is therefore to be a king; he is to reign “over the house of Jacob.” Mary had grown up in the midst of these expectations of her people: could she guess, at the moment of the annunciation, the vital significance of the angel’s words? And how is one to understand that “kingdom” which “will have no end”?

Although through faith she may have perceived in that instant she was the mother of the “messiah King,” nevertheless she replied: “*Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord*; let it be to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38). From the first moment Mary professed above all the “obedience of faith,” abandoning herself to the meaning which was given to the words of the annunciation by him from whom they proceeded: God himself.

16. Later, a little further along this way of the “obedience of faith,” Mary *hears other words*: those uttered by *Simeon* in the Temple of Jerusalem. It was now forty days after the birth of Jesus when, in accordance with the precepts of the Law of Moses, Mary and Joseph “brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord” (Lk 2:22). The birth had taken place in conditions of extreme poverty. We know from Luke that when, on the occasion of the census ordered by the Roman

authorities, Mary went with Joseph to Bethlehem, having found “no place in the inn,” *she gave birth to her Son in a stable* and “laid him in a manger” (cf. Lk 2:7).

A just and God-fearing man called Simeon appears at this beginning of Mary’s “journey” of faith. His words, suggested by the Holy Spirit (cf. Lk 2:25–27), confirm the truth of the annunciation. For we read that he took up in his arms the child to whom—in accordance with the angel’s command—the name Jesus was given (cf. Lk 2:21). Simeon’s words match the meaning of this name, which is Savior: “God is salvation.” Turning to the Lord, he says: “For my eyes have seen your *salvation* which you have prepared *in the presence of all peoples*, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel” (Lk 2:30–32). At the same time, however, Simeon addresses Mary with the following words: “Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a *sign that is spoken against*, that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed”; and he adds with direct reference to her: “and a sword will pierce through your own soul also” (cf. Lk 2:34–35). Simeon’s words cast new light on the announcement which Mary had heard from the angel: Jesus is the Savior, he is “a *light* for revelation” to mankind. Is not this what was manifested in a way on Christmas night, when the *shepherds* came to the stable (cf. Lk 2:8–20)? Is not this what was to be manifested even more clearly in the coming of the *Magi from the East* (cf. Mt 2:1–12)? But at the same time, at the very beginning of his life, the Son of Mary, and his Mother with him, will experience in themselves the truth of those other words of Simeon: “a sign that is spoken against” (Lk

2:34). Simeon's words seem like a *second annunciation to Mary*, for they tell her of the actual historical situation in which the Son is to accomplish his mission, namely, in misunderstanding and sorrow. While this announcement on the one hand confirms her faith in the accomplishment of the divine promises of salvation, on the other hand it also reveals to her that she will have to live her obedience of faith in suffering, at the side of the suffering Savior, and that her motherhood will be mysterious and sorrowful. Thus, after the visit of the Magi who came from the East, after their homage ("they fell down and worshipped him") and after they had offered gifts (cf. Mt 2:11), Mary together with the child *has to flee into Egypt* in the protective care of Joseph, for "Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him" (cf. Mt 2:13). And until the death of Herod they will have to remain in Egypt (cf. Mt 2:15).

17. When the Holy Family returns to Nazareth after Herod's death, there begins the long *period of the hidden life*. She "who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord" (Lk 1:45) lives the reality of these words day by day. And daily at her side is the Son to whom "*she gave the name Jesus*"; therefore in contact with him she certainly uses this name, a fact which would have surprised no one, since the name had long been in use in Israel. Nevertheless, Mary knows that he who bears the name *Jesus has been called by the angel "the Son of the Most High"* (cf. Lk 1:32). Mary knows she has conceived and given birth to him "without having a husband," by the power of the Holy Spirit, by the power of the Most High who overshadowed her (cf. Lk 1:35), just as at the time of Moses and the patriarchs the cloud