

The prayer we know as the Angelus goes back to at least the 14th or 15th centuries, getting its name from the first word of its first line, from its original Latin: "*Angelus Domini nuntiavit Mariæ*".

It's been traditionally recited three times of day: in the morning, afternoon, and evening. It's what we call a devotional prayer, meaning that it's primarily an expression of one's personal piety. And it focuses on the mystery that we hear described in today's Gospel: Mary's encounter with the angel Gabriel, but more personally—as filled out by the words in the Gospel—it speaks to what this encounter therefore means for us.

A beautiful 19th century painting (by Jean-Francois Millet) shows a husband and wife—having heard the Angeles bell, somewhere in the nearby town—pausing from their farm work with hands clasped and heads bowed, to pray the Angelus. Adding some meditations, we'll pray the Angelus, as the basis of my words to you today. Please kneel.

V. The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary.***R. And she conceived of the Holy Spirit.***

The Angel Gabriel told her, "*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.*" Upon her response, God gave, and Mary received. The Holy Spirit came to rest over her, like the cloud of the LORD that covered the tabernacle in the presence of the Israelites (Ex 40:38).

Suddenly, her body became the new tabernacle, as the second Person of the Most Holy Trinity came to life in a new way within her.

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with Thee; Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

V. Behold the handmaid of the Lord.***R. Be it done unto me according to thy word.***

God's plan was laid before her, and awaiting her response, all creation waited with bated breath: "*You have heard, O Virgin, that you will conceive and bear a son.... The angel awaits an answer.... We too are waiting, O Lady, for your word of compassion.... The price of our salvation is offered to you. We shall be set free at once if you consent....*

Tearful Adam with his sorrowing family begs this of you, O loving Virgin, in their exile from Paradise. Abraham begs it, David begs it. All the other holy patriarchs, your ancestors, ask it of you.... This is what the whole earth waits for.... freedom for the condemned, indeed, salvation for all the sons of Adam, the whole of your race.... Answer quickly, O Virgin.... Answer with a word, receive the Word of God.

....Let humility be bold, let modesty be confident.... Open your heart to faith, O blessed Virgin, your lips to praise, your womb to the Creator. See, the desired of all nations is at your door, knocking to enter.... Arise in faith, hasten in devotion, open in praise and thanksgiving" (Bernard of Clairvaux).

Hail Mary,.....

V. And the Word was made Flesh.***R. And dwelt among us.***

The one God who always was; who spoke creation into being and gave life to all things; the God who made His home among Moses and the people of Israel as they journeyed toward the Promised Land in Canaan (Ex 25:8)—this God took on human flesh, and all that comes with it—its beauty, but also its weaknesses. In order to overcome the curse that came through the tempter's promptings, and all the ways that human flesh was tainted, including death, God came to redeem it, and to provide a way to transcend death. And He chose to use human flesh as the remedy for this curse.

As St. Cyril of Alexandria declared: "*Only if it is one and the same Christ who is truly God and also truly man, can he save us, for the meeting ground between God and man is the flesh of Christ. We come into contact with Christ's divinity through his humanity....*"

Hail Mary,.....

V. Pray for us, O holy Mother of God.

R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Mother most gentle, your Son Jesus, entrusted us to you, that we might be your sons and daughters, in this life. Mother most pure, assumed into heaven, echo our cries, we who have recourse to thee, that we might live with you in heaven.

Let us pray: *Pour forth, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy grace into our hearts, that we to whom the Incarnation of Christ Thy Son was made known by the message of an angel, may by His Passion and Cross be brought to the glory of His Resurrection. Through the same Christ Our Lord. Amen.*