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“Let us open our ears to the divine Word”

In his 22 January general audience, Pope Francis continued the catechetical cycle on Jesus Christ, our hope, for the Jubilee of 2025, speaking about the Annunciation.

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Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Today we will resume the catecheses of the Jubilee cycle on *Jesus Christ our hope*.

At the beginning of his Gospel, Luke shows the effects of the transforming power of the Word of God, which reaches not only the halls of the Temple, but also the poor dwelling of a young woman, Mary, who, betrothed to Joseph, still lives with her family.

After Jerusalem, the messenger of the great divine annunciations, Gabriel, is sent to a village never mentioned in the Hebrew Bible: Nazareth. At that time, it was a small village in Galilee, in a remote area of Israel, a border area with the pagans and their contamination.

It is there that the angel brings a message of an entirely unheard-of form and content, so much so that Mary's heart is shaken, disturbed. In the place of the classic greeting,

“Peace be with you,” Gabriel addresses the Virgin with the invitation “*Hail!*,” “*rejoice!*,” an appeal dear to sacred history, because the prophets use it when they announce the coming of the Messiah (cf. *Zeph* 3:14; *Joel* 2:21-23, *Zec* 9:9). It is the invitation to the joy that the Lord addresses to His people when the exile ends and the Lord makes His living and active presence felt.

In addition, God calls Mary with a loving name unknown in biblical history: *kecharitoméne*, which means “filled with divine grace.” Mary is full of divine grace. This name says that God’s love has already for some time inhabited, and continues to dwell in Mary’s heart. He says how “gracious” she is, and above all how God’s grace has accomplished in her an inner engraving, making her His masterpiece: full of grace.

This loving moniker, which God gives only to Mary, is immediately accompanied by reassurance: “Do not be afraid!” “Do not be afraid:” the presence of the Lord always gives us this grace of not fearing, and so He says to Mary: “Do not be afraid!” God says “Do not be afraid” to Abraham, Isaac and Moses in history: “Do not be afraid!” (cf. *Gen* 15:1; 26:24; *Dt* 31:8; *Joshua* 8:1). And He says to us too: “Do not be afraid, keep going; do not be afraid!” “*Father, I am afraid of this;*” “*And what do you do when...;*” “*I am sorry, Father, I will tell you the truth: I go to the fortune teller*” - “*You go to the fortune teller!*” “*Ah yes, I have my palm read...*” Please, do not be afraid! Do not be afraid! Do not be afraid! This is good. “I am your travelling companion:” and He says this to Mary. The “Almighty,” the God of the “impossible” (*Lk* 1:37) is *with* Mary, together with and beside her; He is her companion, her principal

ally, the eternal “I-with-you” (cf. *Gen* 28:15; *Ex* 3:12; *Jdg* 6:12).

Then Gabriel announces to the Virgin her mission, making echo in her heart numerous biblical passages referring to the kingship and messianic nature of the child that must be born of her, and that the child will be presented as the fulfilment of the ancient prophecies. The Word that comes from on High calls Mary to be the mother of the Messiah, that long-awaited Davidic Messiah. She is the mother of the Messiah. He will be king, but not in the human and carnal manner, but in the divine, spiritual manner. His name will be “*Jesus*,” which means “*God saves*” (cf. *Lk* 1:31; *Mt* 1:21), reminding everyone forever that it is not man who saves, but only God. Jesus is the One who will fulfil these words of the prophet Isaiah: “It was not an envoy or a messenger, but His

presence that saved them [with] His love and pity” (*Is* 63:9).

This motherhood shakes Mary to the core. And as the intelligent woman she is, thus capable of reading into events (cf. *Lk* 2:19,51), she tries to understand, to discern what is happening to her. Mary does not look outside, but within. And there, in the depths of her open and sensitive heart, she hears the invitation to trust in God, who has prepared for her a special “Pentecost.” Just as at the beginning of creation (cf. *Gen* 1:2), God wants to nurture Mary with His Spirit, a power capable of opening what is closed without violating it, without encroaching on human freedom; He wants to envelop her in the “clouds” of His presence (cf. *1 Cor* 10:1-2) because the Son lives in her, and her in Him.

And Mary is illuminated with trust: she is “a lamp with many lights.”

Mary welcomes the Word in her own flesh and thus launches the greatest mission ever entrusted to a woman, to a human creature. She places herself in service: she is full of everything, not like a slave but as a collaborator of God the Father, full of dignity and authority in order to administer, as she will do at Cana, the gifts of divine treasure, so that many will be able to draw from it with both hands.

Sisters, brothers, let us learn from Mary, Mother of the Saviour and our Mother, to let ourselves open our ears to the divine Word and to welcome it and cherish it, so that it may transform our hearts into tabernacles of His presence, in hospitable homes where hope grows. Thank you!

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