

**PRAYER ON THE FEAST OF THE ANNUNCIATION TO MARY**

*In the morning:*

Blessed be the Kingdom now and for ever. Amen

Blessed are you, Lord God of the universe. In your great and loving kindness you chose Mary to carry in her body the Body of the Word. From her, He took our flesh and made it His own, so that we call her forever blessed. Today, we rejoice in the gift of this new day and share the joy of all creation; for you, Lord our God, are blessed for ever. Amen

*At evening:*

The Angel of the Lord brought good news to Mary and she conceived by the Holy Spirit. Blessed be God for ever! Amen

A Reading from the Letter of St Paul to the Church of Galatia

What I to say is this: as long as the heir is a child, the heir is hardly better than a slave, even though the child shares ownership of the whole estate. The child is under the guardianship and direction of the slave-teacher until the day the child's father has set for the child to be free and to inherit the child's share. It is like that with us. We used to be like slaves, like children, putting ourselves under the control of 'the elemental spirits of the universe'. But then The Time came. God poured forth His Son, born of a woman, to free those under the Law, so that we might receive adoption as full heirs; and, because you are heirs, God has sent the Spirit of His Son to us, calling out with us 'Abba! (Father!)'. So, through God, you are no longer living the slave-life. You are God's sons and daughters; and, as God's sons and daughters, you are an heir.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church. Thanks be to God

*Please pause after this reading before moving on to the reflection.*

*The Reflection ...*

A single Greek word is translated by our evocative English phrase, ‘elemental spirits’, and it is *stoicheia*. It certainly means ‘what is put in order’; but what words *mean* and how they’re used are two things that aren’t always the same. It’s a word that was indeed meant to mean ‘elemental spirits’; but it can also mean something like ‘basic values’ or ‘basic teachings’ – that sort of thing. The Galatian Christian people, or those who had been pagans, would have been soaked into a world in which everything is foreordained and decided, with what little opportunity for change being in the arbitrary and capricious control of petty gods or demons: appease them with lavish offerings and your world (you!) would be a better place for you. But few could afford to be lavish to the ‘elemental spirits’ and most resigned themselves to their allocated lot in life. The Christian life offered something that was so different to all this determinism that it was not just revolutionary, it was rebellious! In putting on Christ, you have put off your slavery to petty chance and to ‘destiny’. Yours is an open and free life. Don’t go back into slavery to fear and appeasement and ‘destiny’ (‘it’s decreed by the gods’/ ‘it’s written in the stars’!). The present and the future are open – and the free and open future is God’s gift.

A gift which Paul marks out as beginning with the Son ‘born of a woman’. I’ve often pointed out how we’re so scripturally illiterate, words and phrases and concepts just wash over us and pass us by. But what Paul says here is part of the rebellion mentioned above. ‘Born of a woman!’. To be born of a woman in paganism is to be cursed with destiny; to be (re-)born in Baptism is to be immersed into freedom – and all through a woman: Mary, ever-blessed.

#### *The Prayer*

(Prepare your body for prayer – for we pray as whole people, not merely as minds. Sit or stand comfortably. The Christian prays by holding her hands out with palms upturned – that way she prays as the people of Christ pray).

✚ For the whole people of God, wherever they may be, let us pray to the Lord;

- ✚ For Bishops, Priests, and for Deacons still offering the prayers. For our Bishops and priests, who still offer the Eucharist; let us pray to the Lord;
- ✚ For the whole world, confined to privacy – we remember St Paul’s message of the open freedom of Christ – let us pray to the Lord;
- ✚ For our Schools and Hospitals; for our care homes; for all living in solitude that it might be a place of prayer; let us pray to the Lord;
- ✚ For each other; for the people of St John’s Church; for Keele, its Parish Council and University; for [*names ...*] our neighbours, friends, and family; let us pray to the Lord;
- ✚ For those who live in the slavery of oppression and suppression; for victims of domestic violence; for those in the grip of addiction; for all who live in fear or ignorance; let us pray to the Lord
- ✚ And with Mary, ever-blessed, we pray (Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil; for Thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen

May the Love of God surround us and uphold us in all things. Amen

May the joy that is Mary’s fill you and refresh you and bring you freedom. Amen

May the peace of Christ rule in our lives. Amen