

“I Am Our Lady of the Divine Indwelling, Handmaid of Him Who Dwells Within”



In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, "Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" And the angel said to her in reply, "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. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God." Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." (The New American Bible, Luke 1:26-39)

And so the Virgin Mary became Mother of the Sacred Humanity as the Word of God took flesh within her, Theotokos, the God-bearer, bearing Him into our world and into our lives. Interestingly, St. Luke is the only evangelist who gives the account of the Annunciation. Why? We know that St. Luke was not Jewish but was a highly educated Greek, probably not one of Jesus' 72 disciples but most likely a convert of St. Paul's shortly after Christ's death. Being learned and well traveled, he would have been familiar with Hebrew and Aramaic as well as Greek. Being a physician by profession, he recounts dramatic miracles of healing, some the other writers do not, emphasizing the role of Jesus as the Divine Physician of body and soul. It is confirmed by the early Church fathers that the evangelists would have based their Gospels on the eye witness accounts of those who walked intimately with Jesus. Who could have walked more intimately with Jesus than Mary? There are no accidents with God. No doubt, guided

by the Holy Spirit, Our Lady would have communicated with St. Luke, the expert on matters of the body, the wondrous deeds God had wrought in her with the miraculous conception and birth of Jesus and the visit of the shepherds, tending sheep likely to be used for sacrifice in the temple. While the early Church understood from their lived experience and did not question Mary's perpetual virginity and the divine sonship of Jesus, God knew these truths would come under attack by the evil one throughout the ages. Luke's account of the Annunciation with Mary's proclamation of her virginity and Gabriel's proclamation of the divine sonship of Jesus would be foundational to the Church's unfolding of the dogmas about Mary and in refuting the heresies that would spring up attacking the full divinity and the full humanity of Jesus.

St. Luke was one of the most extensive and versatile writers of the New Testament, an artist, both with paint and with words, as is clear from his writings and from a number of paintings of Jesus and Mary that have been attributed to him. Many believe he was the first to paint the Madonna and Child. His graphic descriptions of the Annunciation, the Visitation, Our Lord's birth, the visit of the Shepherds, the Presentation in the temple, and other parables and miracles of Jesus have become the most popular themes of Christian painters. He has been declared the patron saint of artists. As an evangelist, he is represented by a calf or ox, a sacrificial animal, because his Gospel begins with the priest Zachary, who is a type of Jesus as the Eternal High Priest and the Lamb of Sacrifice for the redemption of all mankind.

Since we are in the liturgical season of Lent, it is fitting that we reflect upon the image we know well as Our Lady of Perpetual Help, the oldest icon of the Blessed Virgin. It is believed St. Luke created the original icon of this image of Our Lady while she was still alive, and when Our Lady saw it, she blessed the artist and placed a blessing on the icon; hence it is known to bring miracles and untold grace wherever it is venerated. Eventually it was enshrined in a church in Constantinople where it stayed for



a thousand years. The original icon disappeared from human history during the siege of Constantinople in 1453. Some claim Our Lady took the icon and the imperial crown to heaven the night before the siege; however, many copies of the image have been preserved to this day.

In the image known as a *Theotokos of the Passion*, Our Lady is wearing a red gown and a blue mantle and veil. On the left is the Archangel Michael with the lance and sponge that would be used in Jesus' crucifixion. On the right is the Archangel Gabriel carrying a 3-bar cross and nails. A star on Mary's forehead signifies the meaning of her name and her role as Star of the Sea, our guiding light through the storms of our journey of faith. Both of Mary's hands are pointing to Jesus who must be the center of every life. The image suggests the Christ-child has been

alarmed by a presentiment of His passion (gazing with bewilderment at the angels) and has run to His Mother and clings to her for comfort; hence, the dangling sandal. Mary's expression is solemn and ponderous as she looks out toward the viewer rather than toward her Son, **as if beckoning us to ponder** the mystery of our salvation which she holds in her hands. The image portrays the artist's grasp of the mystery of who Jesus is and how his human nature was informed by His divine nature, and it suggests Mary and Jesus were both given insight into their roles as co-redeemers very early in the life of the Child, an understanding that would bind their two hearts as one in sorrow and in love.

The words of Our Lady of America® echo the power of Luke's "painting in words" of the Annunciation and the Incarnation of the God-man within her. His icon in paint speaks of her spiritual motherhood as she directs her gaze out to us, her children, who are joined to the Mystical Body of her Son in His redeeming grace.

"I am the Mother of the sacred humanity, and it is my special work as co-redemptrix of the human race to help souls reach the sanctity of the Father in eternal union by showing them how to put on Christ, to imbibe His Spirit, and thus become one with Him."

"My heart, my Immaculate Heart, is the channel through which the graces of the Sacred Heart are given to men."

"But to make your hearts grow more and more like to the Heart of the Son, you must go to the Mother, whose heart is most like His. From this Pure and Immaculate Heart you will learn all that will make you more pleasing to the Divine Heart of the Son of God. The Holy Trinity looks down with infinite delight upon such souls and makes them Its heaven upon earth." (Sister Mildred (Mary Ephrem) Neuzil, Diary, OUR LADY OF AMERICA®, Fostoria, Ohio, Pgs. 24, 18, 16.)

It is in that awesome mystery and grace of the Divine Indwelling Presence of the Most Holy Trinity within ourselves that we share with Mary the mystery of the Incarnation of Jesus, becoming, like her, a tabernacle in flesh for the Living God. On the feast of Our Lady of Snows, August 5, 1957, Our Lady spoke to Sister Mildred Neuzil, visionary of this apparition of Our Lady of America®, on the Divine Indwelling. Sister wrote:

It was her life and she lived it perfectly, always conscious of His presence, never forgetting that all her greatness came from within, from Him Who dwelt there, working, loving, and doing good through her. This is what Our Lady means when she speaks of reformation, renewal. It is this about which she is so concerned, namely, sanctification from within.

As Our Lady spoke this, she seemed at the time to be deeply occupied. Though the serenity of her countenance never left her, she spoke with a gravity that made her words all the more solemn. She seemed anxious to impress me with some idea of the greatness of this gift of God to us, namely, His Divine Presence within our souls through sanctifying grace. (Diary, Pg. 18.)

On November 23, 1957, Our Lady showed herself to Sister Mildred in another image that describes Our Lady so magnificently as she truly is, **the Immaculate Tabernacle of the Indwelling God.**

Our Lady was standing on a globe, her right foot resting on a crescent or quarter moon, the left on the snout of a rather small and very ugly looking dragon. I saw fire come out of his huge jaws, but not very much, as he could not open them wide enough because of Our Lady's foot. At times he seemed to be somewhat black, again of a shade of green. Our Lady was all in white. Her veil was so long that it seemed to envelop the globe halfway. Sometimes the veil appeared so transparent that Our Lady's hair could be seen through it, and the hair seemed to be sparkling with the light of many glittering stars. At times the edges of the veil, sleeves, and garments seemed to be outlined in light. The veil was held about her head by a wreath of white roses. Her feet were bare.

The previous day Our Lady had appeared with her hands outstretched. At this second visit she slowly raised them, then crossed them on her breast rather close to her waist. While doing so, she bent her head slightly forward, and it seemed that her eyes were closed, not just lowered. On her breast, as though through a veil, the Triangle and the Eye, which is so often depicted as the symbol of the Divine Indwelling, could be visibly seen. I said that Our Lady's feet were bare, that is, devoid of any kind of footwear, but on each foot was a large white rose. The roses, both on the feet and on the crown, were of such dazzling whiteness that the outlines of the petals could barely be seen, sometimes not at all. It seemed that a strong beam of light streamed from the Divine Presence within Our Lady onto the globe at her feet. Then halfway around the figure of Our Lady above her head appeared a scroll on which were written in letters of gold the words: "All the glory of the King's daughter is within."

Though it did not appear that her lips moved, yet I heard these words quite plainly: "I am Our Lady of the Divine Indwelling, handmaid of Him Who dwells within."

She seemed suffused in a soft glow of light that appeared to come from within her. It seemed to permeate and, as it were, saturate her whole being, even her apparel and the roses. (Diary, Pgs. 22-23.)

Here we see completed the glory of the Word made flesh in the womb of Mary and in her soul and understand Jesus' inseparable communion with the Divine Trinity, a holiness and magnitude of God's splendor that each of us is called to share in. Through

the passion and death and resurrection of Jesus, we, too, must be **sanctified from within** through the Divine Indwelling of that same Most Holy Trinity, both in the flesh of our lives and in the sanctuary of our souls as Mary was. Just as the icon of the **Theotokos of the Passion** brought miracles wherever it went, so **Our Lady of America, the Immaculate Tabernacle of the Indwelling God®**, promises us miracles, too, **greater than those granted at Lourdes and Fatima, miracles not of the body but of the soul**. The lance that the Archangel Michael carried in the icon of St. Luke, the lance that would pierce the side of Jesus, would not have been felt by Jesus who was already dead, as the water and blood that poured out from His wound confirmed. Was not the lance of Longinus the fulfillment of Simeon's prophecy to Mary at the Presentation, that her own heart a sword would pierce? It was she, standing at the foot of the Cross, who felt that lance, that sword, for her Heart was one with Jesus. We were redeemed at such a great cost by the sufferings of her Son and of herself, in union with Him, our Savior Who loves us with infinite charity. She, **Theotokos of the Passion, Our Lady of America®, is our Lady of Perpetual Help and our Mother of Mercy**, living only to give Jesus to us and to bring us to Him. The way is to become, like her, pure tabernacles of the Indwelling God.

On July 18, 1980, Our Lady begged Sister to spread this urgent message to all her children.

“You must try to make my people understand that the life of God within them is the source of their peace and happiness. There is no other way. This is what my Son came to teach and bring and it was for this He lived and died. Unless this mystery of God’s Presence within is accepted and lived, peace will not come. It is the only way, believe me, my daughter.” (Diary, Pg. 37.)

Do we truly understand that the life of God within us is the only way to true happiness and peace?

Let us, like the Child Jesus, run to our spiritual Mother and cling to her for comfort and guidance, to learn all that we need to know for our salvation, to be formed into the image of her Son so we can humbly acknowledge with her: **“All the glory of the King’s daughter [son] is within!”** And then may we pray with her:

My soul magnifies the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. For he has looked upon his handmaid’s lowliness; ... The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.
(Luke 1:46-50)

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