

Fact of FAITH

The Annunciation

by Rev. Larry Rice, CSP

During the season of Lent, Catholic churches are adorned in purple, symbolizing repentance and solemnity. There are at least two occasions during Lent, however, when the liturgical colors change, at least briefly. One such occasion is the fourth Sunday of Lent, which used to be called Laetare Sunday. On that Sunday, churches—if they have them—can use rose-colored vestments and paraments. Another occasion to put away the purple for the day is the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord.

The feast of the Annunciation is on March 25, for reasons that I hope are obvious. Start with Christmas on December 25, and subtract nine months, and you'll get the reason for the feast. The Annunciation celebrates the coming of the Archangel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary and announcing to her that she is to be the mother of the Savior. This event has been one of the classic religious subjects of Western art for centuries. The next time you're at your computer, go to the Google search engine, and search for the word "Annunciation," then click on the tab that says "Images." You'll find hundreds of painting of the Annunciation. Most of these depict the archangel appearing to Mary. She is depicted holding a book; a visual reference to the fact that her child would fulfill the words of the Old Testament prophets. The coming of the Holy Spirit is portrayed by a descending dove or by a ray of light shining from heaven.

On the feast of the Annunciation, we switch to white vestments and pray the Gloria at the beginning of the Mass, both are symbols of the joy that accompanies the Incarnation—Christ becoming human and choosing to be born as one of us. Even during the solemn penitential season of Lent, the Church acknowledges the coming of the Savior with hope and joy.

Father Rice is Vocations Director for the Paulist Fathers.