

## PART I

### MARY IN THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST

#### 1. Full of grace

7. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (*Eph* 1:3). These words of the *Letter to the Ephesians* reveal the eternal design of God the Father, his plan of man’s salvation in Christ. It is a universal plan, which concerns all men and women created in the image and likeness of God (cf. *Gen* 1:26). Just as all are included in the creative work of God “in the beginning”, so all are eternally included in the divine plan of salvation, which is to be completely revealed, in the “fullness of time”, with the final coming of Christ. In fact, the God who is the “Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”—these are the next words of the same *Letter*—“*chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of*

our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace" (*Eph* 1:4-7).

*The divine plan of salvation*—which was fully revealed to us with the coming of Christ—is eternal. And according to the teaching contained in the *Letter* just quoted and in other Pauline Letters (cf. *Col* 1:12-14; *Rom* 3:24; *Gal* 3:13; *2 Cor* 5:18-29), it is also *eternally linked to Christ*. It includes everyone, but it reserves a special place for the "*woman*" who is the Mother of him to whom the Father has entrusted the work of salvation.<sup>19</sup> As the Second Vatican Council says, "she is already prophetically foreshadowed in that promise made to our first parents after their fall into sin"—according to the Book of *Genesis* (cf. 3:15). "Likewise she is the Virgin who is to conceive and bear a son, whose name will be called Emmanuel"—according to the words of Isaiah (cf. 7:14).<sup>20</sup> In this way the Old Testament prepares that "fullness of time" when God "sent forth his Son, born of woman ... so that we might receive adoption as sons. The coming into the world of the Son of God is an event recorded in the

<sup>19</sup> Concerning the predestination of Mary, cf. SAINT JOHN DAMASCENE, *Hom. in Nativitatem*, 7; 10: *S. Ch.* 80, 65; 73; *Hom. in Dormitionem* I, 3: *S. Ch.* 80, 85: "For it is she, who, chosen from the ancient generations, by virtue of the predestination and benevolence of the God and Father who generated you (the World of God) outside time without coming out of himself or suffering change, it is she who gave you birth, nourished of her flesh, in the last time ...".

<sup>20</sup> Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 55.

first chapters of the Gospels according to Luke and Matthew.

8. *Mary is definitively introduced into the mystery of Christ through this event: the Annunciation by the angel. This takes place at Nazareth, within the concrete circumstances of the history of Israel, the people which first received God's promises. The divine messenger says to the Virgin: "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you" (Lk 1:28). Mary "was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be" (Lk 1:29): what could those extraordinary words mean, and in particular the expression "full of grace" (kecharitoméne).<sup>21</sup>*

If we wish to meditate together with Mary on these words, and especially on the expression "full of grace", we can find a significant echo in

<sup>21</sup> In Patristic tradition there is a wide and varied interpretation of this expression: cf. ORIGEN, *In Lucam homiliae*, VI, 7: *S. Ch.* 87, 148; SEVERIANUS OF GABALA, *In mundi creationem, Oratio VI*, 10: PG 56, 497 f.; SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM (Pseudo), *In Annuntiationem Deiparae et contra Arium impium*, PG 62, 765 f.; BASIL OF SELEUCIA, *Oratio 39, In Sanctissimae Deiparae Annuntiationem*, 5: PG 85, 441-446; ANTIPATER OF BOSRA, *Hom. II, In Sanctissimae Deiparae Annuntiationem*, 3-11: PG 85, 1777-1783; SAINT SOPHRONIUS OF JERUSALEM, *Oratio II, In Sanctissimae Deiparae Annuntiationem*, 17-19: PG 87/3, 3235-3240; SAINT JOHN DAMASCENE, *Hom. in Dormitionem*, I, 70: *S. Ch.* 80, 96-101; SAINT JEROME, *Epistola 65*, 9: PL 22, 628; SAINT AMBROSE, *Expos. Evang. sec. Lucam*, II, 9: CSEL 32/4, 45 f.; SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Sermo 291*, 4-6: PL 38, 1318 f.; *Enchiridion*, 36, 11: PL 40, 250; SAINT PETER CHRYSOLOGUS, *Sermo 142*: PL 52, 579 f.; *Sermo 143*: PL 52, 583; SAINT FULGENTIUS OF RUSPE, *Epistola 17*, VI, 12: PL 65, 458; SAINT BERNARD, *In laudibus Virginis Matris, Homilia III*, 2-3: *S. Bernardi Opera*, IV, 1966, 36-38.