

What is the Angelus and how do you pray it?

The Angelus is a prayer in which we contemplate the mystery of the Incarnation, the event by which "the Son of God became man in order to make us God." It is a short pause in our day-to-day activity, immersing us in the intimacy of our Lady and the Blessed Trinity.

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Summary

1. What is the Angelus?
2. How did this devotion begin?
3. Why does meditating on this scene matter to Christians?
4. When is the Angelus prayed?
5. What is the connection between the Angelus prayer and the "Angelus" of the Pope?

1. What is the Angelus?

The Angelus is a Marian and Christological prayer of the Catholic Church, honouring our Lady. This prayer "invites us to meditate on the

mystery of the Incarnation, encouraging Christians to take Mary as a point of reference in the various moments of their day, so as to imitate her in her readiness to carry out the divine plan of salvation" (John Paul II, General Audience). To this contemplation of the life of Christ is added the purpose of greeting the Virgin and having recourse to her merciful intercession.

A liturgical composition with a simple structure and biblical character, the Angelus leads us to commemorate the Incarnation of the Son of God. We ask to be led, through his Passion and Cross, to the glory of the Resurrection. The Angelus prayer (or "angelic greeting") consists of the recitation of three verses interspersed with three Hail Mary's:

The angel of the Lord declared unto Mary.

And she conceived by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Hail Mary.

Behold the handmaid of the Lord.

Be it done unto me according to your word.

Hail Mary.

And the Word was made flesh.

And dwelt among us.

Hail Mary.

This part recalls the Virgin's prompt assent to the Lord's will and the Savior's coming to us. Then we implore Mary's intercession:

Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God.

That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

It ends with a prayer indicating the central event of the Redemption:

Let us pray. Pour forth we beseech you, O Lord, your grace into our hearts so that we to whom, the Incarnation of Christ, your Son, was made known by the message of an angel, may by his Passion and Cross be brought to the glory of his Resurrection, through the same Christ Our Lord. Amen.

Meditate with St. Josemaría

- "For Mary is closely tied to the greatest sign of God's love — the Word made flesh who took upon himself our sins and weakness. Faithful to the divine purpose for which she was born, Mary continues to spend herself in the service of men, who are all called to be brothers of her son Jesus. The Mother of God is also truly the mother of men." (*Christ is Passing By*, 140)

- "Look: in the eyes of our Mother Mary we never cease to be little, because she opens to us the way to the Kingdom of Heaven, which will only be given to those who become little children. We should never separate ourselves from Our Lady. How should we honour her? By keeping close to her, talking to her, showing her that we love her, pondering in our hearts the scenes of her life on earth and telling her about our struggles, successes and failures.
- "When we do this we discover the meaning of the Marian prayers, which the Church has always used, as if we were saying them for the very first time. What are the Hail Mary and the Angelus if not loving praises of her divine Motherhood? And when we say the Holy Rosary, which is a

wonderful devotion which I will never tire of recommending to Christians everywhere, our minds and hearts go over the mysteries of Mary's admirable life which are, at the same time, the fundamental mysteries of our faith." (*Friends of God*, 290)

2. When did this devotion begin?

In the early Middle Ages, the bells of monasteries and convents were rung to recite the Second Prayer, after the "Compline"^[1] (part of the Liturgy of the Hours). In the 13th century, the custom of reciting three Hail Mary's to the evening sound of the bells began, and very soon the practice was extended to include a second recitation in the morning. In the 15th century, in France, the custom was again extended to a recitation at midday.^[2] This practice has evolved into the prayers that today make up the Angelus.

The first document to record the Angelus in its present form is a catechism printed in Venice in 1560. The practice of this custom spread in 1571 when Pope St. Pius V inserted the recitation of the Angelus in the "Little Office of Our Lady" (a liturgical devotional of the Virgin Mary). Later, in 1724, its diffusion became universal and definitive with the document "*Iniunctae nobis*" of Pope Benedict XIII, in which he granted indulgences for the recitation of the Angelus.^[3]

The Angelus was modified again with Pope Benedict XIV in 1742, who established that during Easter time it should be replaced by the antiphon *Regina coeli*. The custom continues to be lived thus up to the present time.

In 1815, Pope Pius VII added three Glory Be's to the end of the Angelus in thanksgiving for the gifts bestowed on our Lady by the Blessed

Trinity. This last practice is still typically lived in Italy.

Meditate with St. Josemaría

- "When contemplating the scene of the Incarnation, strengthen in your soul the resolve to be "humble in practice". See how he lowered himself, taking on our poor nature. That is why every day you need to react, right away, with God's grace, accepting — and wanting — the humiliations the Lord may offer you." (*The Forge*, 139)
- "You see how simply she said it? *Ecce ancilla*, 'I am the handmaid of the Lord!' — And the Word became flesh. That is how the saints worked: without any outward show. What there was, was in spite of them." (*The Way*, 510)
- "Mother, Oh Mother! With that word of yours — fiat,' be it

done' — you have made us brothers of God and heirs to his Glory. Blessed art thou!" (*The Way*, 512)

3. Why does meditating on this scene matter to Christians?

The fulfillment of God's promises to his people begins with the Annunciation to Mary: the archangel Gabriel presents God's plan of salvation to her, inviting her to become the Mother of the Redeemer. Mary, certain that nothing is impossible for God, responds with trust. By giving her consent to the word of God, she becomes the Mother of Jesus through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Through her assent, the Virgin Mary accepts the God's salvific plan wholeheartedly and gives herself to the service of her Son and to the Mystery of Redemption. Through her obedience, for her own salvation and

that of the whole human race, Mary continues to collaborate with this divine plan by being the mother of all men and intercessor of the Church. "Woman of 'yes,' who promptly accepted the Angel's invitation, she also responds to our supplications, she listens to our voices, even those that remain closed in our hearts, which do not have the strength to come out but which God knows better than we know ourselves" (Pope Francis, General Audience).

The Church's Magisterium proposes the Angelus prayer as an invitation to each of us to join Mary's "yes" and trustfully adhere to the beauty of the plan that God has prepared. It is also an opportunity to live the communion of saints, feeling supported by the prayer of so many of the faithful who pray this prayer every day.

Meditate with St. Josemaría

- "How lovable is the scene of the Annunciation. How often we have meditated on this! Mary is recollected in prayer. She is using all her senses and her faculties to speak to God. It is in prayer that she comes to know the divine Will. And with prayer she makes it the life of her life. Do not forget the example of the Virgin Mary!" (*Furrow*, 481)
- "Remember the scene at the Annunciation? The Archangel comes down bearing a divine message — the announcement that Mary is to be the Mother of God — and he finds her withdrawn in prayer. When Gabriel greets her, she is totally absorbed in God. 'Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.' A few days later she breaks out into the joy of the Magnificat, a

Marian hymn which the Holy Spirit has transmitted to us through the loving faithfulness of St Luke. It reveals Mary's constant and intimate conversation with God." (*Friends of God*, 241)

4. When is the Angelus prayed?

The Angelus prayer, in the form in which we know it today, was originally prayed three times a day: morning, noon and evening. Today the most widespread custom among the faithful is the midday prayer. During the Easter season (from the day on which the Resurrection is celebrated until the day of Pentecost) the Angelus prayer is replaced by the *Regina Coeli* prayer, which emphasizes the joy of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Following this tradition of the Church, St. Josemaría also lived this custom. "After the reading of the

mail, he would pray the Angelus at noon. It was an important moment in his day, because besides being a filial conversation with our Lady, it marked the time when his Eucharistic devotion changed its tone: until then he had spent the morning giving thanks to God for the Mass he had celebrated; from the Angelus he would begin to prepare himself for the Mass he would celebrate the following day."^[4]

Meditate with St. Josemaría

- "All the feasts of Our Lady are great events, because they are opportunities that the Church gives us to show with deeds that we love Mary. But if I had to choose one among all her feasts, I would choose today's, the feast of the divine Motherhood of the Blessed Virgin.
- "Today's celebration brings us to consider some of the central

mysteries of our faith. We meditate on the Incarnation of the Word, which is the work of the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity. Through the Incarnation of Our Lord in her immaculate womb, Mary, the Daughter of God the Father, is also the Spouse of God the Holy Spirit and the Mother of God the Son.

- "When the Blessed Virgin said Yes, freely, to the plans revealed to her by the Creator, the divine Word assumed a human nature: a rational soul and a body, which was formed in the most pure womb of Mary. The divine nature and the human were united in a single Person: Jesus Christ, true God and, thenceforth, true Man; the only-begotten and eternal Son of the Father and, from that moment on, as Man, the true son of Mary. This is why Our Lady is

the Mother of the Incarnate Word, the second Person of the Blessed Trinity who has united our human nature to himself for ever, without any confusion of the two natures. The greatest praise we can give to the Blessed Virgin is to address her loud and clear by the name that expresses her very highest dignity: Mother of God." (*Friends of God*, 274)

5. What is the connection between the Angelus prayer and the Pope's Angelus?

The "Pope's Angelus" is a public act of the Pope in which he prays the Angelus on Sundays at noon, with the faithful gathered in St. Peter's Square and transmitted by media. This practice began on August 15, 1954, when Pope Pius XII's recitation of the Angelus was broadcast for the first time on radio and television, at the

request of the young people of Catholic Action and on the occasion of the Marian Year. In the autumn of the same year, by decision of the Pope, "who liked to bless the faithful gathered in St. Peter's Square, the Angelus was prayed from the window of his study, as it has been done up to the present day."^[5]

The Angelus prayer is also a time of closeness between the Pope and the faithful. Usually, the Pope accompanies it with some pastoral message, an affectionate greeting to the pilgrims present in St. Peter's Square and those who tune in through various media, and he shares the intentions and concerns of the Church most dear to his heart to ask for prayers. It is a great opportunity for people to pray together with the Holy Father.

Meditate with St. Josemaría

- "Welcome the Pope's words with a religious, humble, internal and effective acceptance. And pass them on!" (*The Forge*, 133)
- "Faithfulness to the Pope includes a clear and definite duty: that of knowing his thought, which he tells us in Encyclicals or other documents. We have to do our part to help all Catholics pay attention to the teaching of the Holy Father, and bring their everyday behaviour into line with it." (*The Forge*, 633)
- "Offer your prayer, your atonement, and your action for this end: *ut sint unum!* — that all of us Christians may share one will, one heart, one spirit. This is so that *omnes cum Petro ad Iesum per Mariam* — that we may all go to Jesus, closely

united to the Pope, through Mary." (*The Forge*, 647)

- "Mary continually builds the Church and keeps it together. It is difficult to have devotion to our Lady and not feel closer to the other members of the mystical body and more united to its visible head, the pope. That's why I like to repeat: All with Peter to Jesus through Mary! By seeing ourselves as part of the Church and united to our brothers in the faith, we understand more deeply that we are brothers of all mankind, for the Church has been sent to all the peoples of the earth." (*Christ is Passing By*, 139).

^[1] Roschini, G. M., & María, S. R. (1962). *La Madre de Dios según la fe y*

la teología. Madrid: Apostolado de la Prensa.

^[2] Royo Marín, A. (1997). *La Virgen María: Teología y espiritualidad marianas.* Madrid: Biblioteca de autores cristianos.

^[3] *Idem.*

^[4] Del Portillo, A., & Cavalleri, C. (2014). *Entrevista sobre el fundador del Opus Dei.* Madrid: Rialp.

^[5] Daud, M. P. (2021, March 25). ¿Qué Papa inauguró la tradición de rezar el Ángelus en San Pedro? Retrieved April 30, 2021, from aleteia.org