

Readings for Today: *2 Samuel 7:1 – 16 (edited); Ps. 89 (89):1 – 4, 27, 29;*
Romans 16: 25 – 27; Luke 1: 26 – 38.

The incident described in today's Gospel Reading is second only to the crucifixion in the number of its representations in Christian art. Indeed, in one of the most notable depictions of the story of salvation – *Piero della Francesca's History of the Cross in Arezzo* – the Annunciation to Mary stands for the whole of the New Testament account of the birth, life, death and resurrection of the Lord.

In this single incident we can see all these themes: –

- * The eternal purpose of God the Father for the salvation of the human race being brought into our world of time and space – at one particular moment, in one particular place.
- * God's age-long preparation for the saving event – his choice of the *House of Jacob* – that is the community of Israel, to be his People; and his choice of *David* (as described in today's first reading) to be the royal ancestor of the infant about to be born.
- * His more immediate preparation in drawing Mary to himself, so that she has *won God's favour*, and so is fit to be the mother of his Son.
- * The high status of the child to be born – he is to be *Son of the Most High, Son of God*.
- * The task this child will have, indicated by his name *Jesus* – the Greek equivalent of Joshua. He is (as the Christmas angel will tell the shepherds) to be a *Saviour*, for his name means 'The LORD saves'.
- * The response of Mary, speaking as the New Eve on behalf of the whole human race: *I am the handmaid of the LORD...let what you have said be done to me*. She makes a profession of faith and trust which is a 'pre-echo' of the words of her son on the eve of his passion, '*not my will but yours be done*'.

Today, as we come close to our celebration of the birth of Jesus, the Annunciation to Mary sets before us the whole of God's plan – a plan which will reach its fulfilment in the reign of his Son over all creation – a reign which, as Paul says in today's second reading, *is only what scripture has predicted, a reign which Gabriel declares will have no end*.