



# ACTION GUIDE

## SOLEMNITY OF THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE LORD: MARCH 25\*

### INTRODUCTION

The celebration of the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord commemorates the visit of the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary to inform her that she was to be the mother of our Savior. After giving her consent to God's word, Mary conceives Jesus in her womb and becomes the mother of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. God becomes incarnate in the womb of a woman, and "the Word became flesh" (John 1:14).


In modern times, this feast day has taken on special meaning in Respect Life ministry. Scientific advances have allowed us to confirm that life begins at conception. This solemnity helps us to recognize the gift of new life from its very beginning. It calls us to reflect on how we are to care for, protect, and welcome new life, as the Blessed Mother did for the Christ child.

The Solemnity of the Annunciation also coincides with the anniversary of the papal encyclical *Evangelium vitae* (*The Gospel of Life*). This Church teaching on the value and inviolability of every human life remains an indispensable source of truth for all people. Written by Pope St. John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae* was appropriately given in Rome on March 25, 1995.

The encyclical highlights the importance of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Annunciation of the Lord in the Church's efforts to promote and defend human life:

*The angel's Annunciation to Mary is framed by these reassuring words: "Do not be afraid, Mary" and "with God nothing will be impossible" (Lk 1:30, 37). The whole of the Virgin Mother's life is in fact pervaded by the certainty that God is near to her and that he accompanies her with his providential care.... Mary is a living word of comfort for the Church in her struggle against death. Showing us the Son, the Church assures us that in him the forces of death have already been defeated.<sup>1</sup>*

**Additional resources for celebrating the *Gospel of Life* anniversary can be found at [respectlife.org/gospel-of-life](https://respectlife.org/gospel-of-life).**



To help you celebrate the Solemnity of the Annunciation, sample timelines, homily helps, announcements, activities, and more are provided. You are encouraged to adapt these resources as needed to fit your specific parish, school, or ministry. The supplemental resources referenced in this action guide can be found at [respectlife.org/action-guides](https://respectlife.org/action-guides), unless otherwise noted.

*\*The Solemnity of the Annunciation is generally celebrated on March 25. However, depending on how this date falls within Lent, its observance is sometimes transferred to another day or even to the Easter season. The proposed dates and timelines used in this action guide assume that it will be celebrated on March 25, but be sure to check whether the celebration will be transferred when making your plans.*



## SIMPLE STEPS

Here is a list of simple steps that you can use in your parish, school, ministry, or home to help in your efforts to celebrate the Solemnity of the Annunciation. These steps offer ideas on how to use the provided resources. Each step may not apply to your specific circumstance, but most can be adapted to suit your needs. The supplemental resources referenced in this action guide can be found at [respectlife.org/action-guides](https://respectlife.org/action-guides), unless otherwise noted.

### 1. Prepare through prayer.

The USCCB produced a novena in honor of the Annunciation called “[A Heart Open to God’s Will](#).” Invite your parish to join in praying this novena. Highlight the novena in your bulletin on the weekends preceding the start of the novena. If possible, make copies of the novena available in a prominent place in your parish on the weekends that the novena announcement appears.

### 2. Reach out to parents expecting a child.

In honor of the Annunciation, ask your pastor to offer the [Blessing of a Child in the Womb](#). Propose the possibility of including this blessing as part of the weekend Masses before the feast day, as not all parishioners will be able to attend Mass on the Solemnity of the Annunciation. Your pastor may prefer to offer the blessing at another time. Once a date and time have been set, invite expectant parents to participate by announcing the blessing from the pulpit and/or including an invitation in the bulletin. You could ask parents to RSVP, but even if you want to leave the option open for parents to come forward without prior notice, you may want to confirm a few parents’ participation ahead of time.

### 3. Educate and celebrate.

A [bulletin insert](#) is available to help educate your faith community about the connection between *Evangelium vitae* (*The Gospel of Life*) and the Solemnity of the Annunciation. Homily helps are also provided if your priest would like to highlight this connection in his homily on the Solemnity of the Annunciation. Additional resources for observing the anniversary of *Evangelium vitae* are also available at [respectlife.org/gospel-of-life](https://respectlife.org/gospel-of-life).

### 4. Pray for expectant parents and unborn children.

Sample intercessions are provided for use during the Prayer of the Faithful during Masses on the weekend preceding the Solemnity of the Annunciation and on the solemnity itself. Schools can use these intercessions to mark the Solemnity of the Annunciation by praying together at the beginning of class. Families can include these intercessions in their regular prayers in the morning or evening, or before or after a family meal.



We would love to see how you and your family, parish, or school participate!

Email us at [prolife@usccb.org](mailto:prolife@usccb.org), or tag us on Facebook ([@usccbrespectlife](https://www.facebook.com/usccbrespectlife)) or Twitter ([@usccbprolife](https://twitter.com/usccbprolife)).

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## SAMPLE TIMELINE

We have provided a sample timeline\* to help you celebrate the Solemnity of the Annunciation and the anniversary of *Evangelium vitae*. While these steps apply most directly to a parish coordinator, they can be adapted to help you think about key steps you can take to plan ahead in whatever capacity you serve the Church.

*\*Because the Solemnity of the Annunciation can fall near the Sunday of Divine Mercy, plans for celebrating these two observances may overlap. Consider combining tasks; for example, maybe it would be helpful to discuss plans for the Solemnity of the Annunciation and the Sunday of Divine Mercy with your pastor during a single meeting. Or, he may prefer separate meetings. Ask what you can do to make the most of your time together. And don't forget that the Solemnity of the Annunciation is sometimes transferred to another date, rather than being celebrated on March 25.*

### FEBRUARY

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

### Early February

- ◆ Visit [respectlife.org/action-guides](https://respectlife.org/action-guides) to review and familiarize yourself with all the resources and materials available to help you celebrate the Solemnity of the Annunciation. Download any resources you hope to use. This would include things like bulletin announcements, intercessions, homily notes, the *Blessing of a Child in the Womb*, and the Annunciation novena, “A Heart Open to God’s Will.”
- ◆ Connect with your pastor, and remind him about the upcoming celebration of the Solemnity of the Annunciation. Let him know what resources are available, such as homily notes, prayer intercessions, and the novena. Ask what your parish might do to observe this important celebration. Most importantly, *ask what you can do to help*. Perhaps emailing him the homily notes directly will save him time. Or, he may ask if you can send the prayer intercessions to another parish staff member. Ask permission for any bulletin submissions you have in mind and for any special activities you would like to plan. Keep in mind that this observance often falls during Lent, which is often a busy time for parishes and priests.
- ◆ Following your conversation with your pastor, contact your parish office to open the lines of communication. Share the results of that conversation and what you are requesting to help celebrate the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord. Ask about bulletin submission policies. Many parishes need content several weeks in advance to be able to include it in the weekly bulletin. Inquire about deadlines and share what content you hope to have featured. This will help your parish plan ahead and allot the necessary space in the bulletin. Lent often requires additional bulletin space for special announcements. Contact your parish while there may still be space available. Again, most importantly, *ask what you can do to help*.
- ◆ If your parish is planning to offer the *Blessing of a Child in the Womb*, be sure to download and/or order a copy for your parish.

## MARCH

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

## Mid to Late February

Complete all bulletin submissions. This includes the bulletin announcements for the novena in preparation of the Solemnity of the Annunciation and invitations for parishioners to receive the *Blessing of a Child in the Womb*.

## Early March

- ◆ Reconnect with appropriate parish staff and your pastor to confirm any plans you may have made and that all content has been received by those who need it, as well as to offer any help needed in tying up loose ends. If you ordered a copy of the *Blessing of a Child in the Womb* for your pastor, check to make sure he has received it.
- ◆ Begin highlighting these celebrations on bulletin boards, in newsletters, and on social media and your website.

## March 16

- ◆ Begin praying the Annunciation novena, “A Heart Open to God’s Will” individually, with your family or a friend, or in union with your parish, school, or ministry community. Consider sharing parts of the novena on social media each day, encouraging others to join in. Pray that the Solemnity of the Annunciation would move hearts and open eyes to the gift of every human life.
- ◆ Touch base with your pastor and/or appropriate parish staff one last time to make sure everything is in order. Be sure your pastor has copies of everything he needs, like the homily notes, intercessions, and the *Blessing of a Child in the Womb*. You may be asked to share copies of these with a deacon or sacristan who helps in preparations for the Sunday Mass.



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## BULLETIN ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Annunciation Novena

(Suggested Weekends: Two Weekends Prior to the Start of the Novena)

#### ◆ Option 1

Join us in praying a special novena March 16-24 in preparation for the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord on March 25. The Annunciation commemorates the visit of the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary to inform her that she was to be the mother of our Savior. After giving her consent to God's word, Mary becomes the mother of God. Let us follow the example of Mary and call upon her intercession to help us open our hearts to say "yes" to God! Copies of the novena can be picked up [\[insert location\]](#).

#### ◆ Option 2

Join us in praying a special novena March 16-24 in preparation for the Solemnity of the Annunciation. Let us follow the example of Mary and call upon her intercession to help us open our hearts to say "yes" to God! Copies of the novena can be picked up [\[insert location\]](#).

### Blessing of a Child in the Womb

(Suggested Weekend: Weekend Before the Solemnity of the Annunciation)

#### ◆ Option 1

Expectant parents are invited to receive a special blessing for their unborn children in celebration of the Solemnity of the Annunciation. The blessing will be offered during all Masses next weekend, March [\[insert date\]](#)-[\[insert date\]](#).

#### ◆ Option 2

Next weekend, during all Masses on March [\[insert date\]](#) & [\[insert date\]](#), expectant parents are invited to join us for a blessing of their children in the womb.

*The dates used in the following announcements assume that the Solemnity of the Annunciation will be celebrated on March 25. If the Solemnity is transferred, be sure to adjust the dates accordingly.*

## PULPIT ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Annunciation Novena

(Suggested Weekends: Two Weekends Prior to the Start of the Novena)

#### ◆ Option 1

You're invited to join us in a special novena from March 16<sup>th</sup> through the 24<sup>th</sup> in preparation for the Solemnity of the Annunciation. The Annunciation commemorates the visit of the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary to inform her that she was to be the mother of our Savior. Let us follow the example of Mary and call upon her to help us open our hearts to say "yes" to God! Copies of the novena will be available [\[insert location\]](#) after Mass.

#### ◆ Option 2

Join us in a special novena from March 16<sup>th</sup> through the 24<sup>th</sup> in preparation for the Solemnity of the Annunciation. Let us follow the example of Mary and call upon her intercession to help us open our hearts to say "yes" to God! Copies of the novena will be available [\[insert location\]](#) after Mass.

### Blessing of a Child in the Womb

(Suggested Weekend: Two Weekends Prior to the Solemnity)

#### ◆ Option 1

Expectant parents are invited to receive a special blessing for their unborn children in celebration of the Solemnity of the Annunciation. The blessing will be offered during all Masses next weekend, March 22-23.

#### ◆ Option 2

Next weekend, expectant parents are invited to receive a special blessing for their child in the womb. The blessing will be offered during all weekend Masses.





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## ► INTERCESSIONS

These sample intercessions were written for use during the month of March in honor of the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord; however, many can be used throughout the year. These intentions are appropriate for inclusion in the Prayer of the Faithful during Mass.

They can also be printed in the weekly bulletin, included at a local Respect Life march or rally, featured in email newsletters, shared on social media platforms, or prayed during personal or family prayer times.

For all expectant mothers:  
That the miracle of new life silently growing in their wombs  
will strengthen in them a commitment  
to cherish all human life;

***We pray to the Lord:***

For parents facing an unexpected pregnancy:  
That they may lovingly accept the precious life  
God has entrusted to their care;

***We pray to the Lord:***

For married couples longing for a child:  
That through the intercession of the Blessed Mother,  
they may be given the grace to trust in God's  
loving plan for their family;

***We pray to the Lord:***

For those considering adoption:  
May the Holy Spirit guide their discernment,  
and grant them the grace to say "yes"  
to God's holy will;

***We pray to the Lord:***

For those suffering the loss of a child:  
May they find healing and peace  
in Christ's promise of everlasting life;

***We pray to the Lord:***

For all Catholics:  
May the incarnation of Christ  
in the womb of the Virgin Mary  
strengthen us in protecting God's gift of life;

***We pray to the Lord:***

## HOMILY HELPS

These homily notes are provided to help priests and deacons make connections to respect for human life on the Solemnity of the Annunciation (March 25). Parts of these reflections on the Annunciation can also be included in the homily the weekend prior to inform the parish community about this upcoming feast day. Brief notes are provided to introduce the congregation to the *Blessing of a Child in the Womb*.

Other ministry leaders can also use these reflections to highlight Respect Life connections elsewhere, such as in a Bible study, in a small group or a faith formation setting, or as part of another ministry gathering.

### Sunday Before the Solemnity of the Annunciation

This upcoming [insert day of week], the Church celebrates the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord. This celebration commemorates the visit of the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary to inform her that she was to be the mother of our Savior. After giving her consent to God's word, Mary conceives Jesus in her womb and becomes the mother of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. God becomes incarnate in the womb of a woman and "the Word became flesh" (John 1:14).

In modern times, this feast day has taken on special meaning in the Church's efforts to protect and defend human life. Scientific advances have allowed us to confirm that life begins at fertilization. The Annunciation helps us to recognize the gift of new life from its very beginning in the womb. It calls us to reflect on how we are to care for, protect, and welcome new life, as the Blessed Mother did for the Christ child.

In anticipation of this great Marian feast day that highlights the humanity of all unborn children, we will be offering the *Blessing of a Child in the Womb*. Expectant parents will be invited to rise, come forward, and receive this blessing upon their children.

*[The Blessing of a Child in the Womb may take place within Mass (after the Prayer of the Faithful), or as an additional solemn blessing at the end of Mass. It may also be given outside the Mass, within the context of a brief celebration of the Word of God, by a priest or deacon.]*

### March 25\* Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord

**First Reading: Isaiah 7:10-14; 8:10**

**Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 40:7-8a, 8b-9, 10, 11**

**Second Reading: Hebrews 10:4-10**

**Gospel Acclamation: John 1:14ab**

**Gospel: Luke 1:26-38**

*\*The celebration of the Annunciation is sometimes transferred from March 25 in order to accommodate Lenten observances.*

**The following sample homily is based on the reflections of Pope St. John Paul II in the conclusion of the encyclical *Evangelium vitae*, nos. 102-105.**

Today is the anniversary of the papal encyclical *Evangelium vitae*, also known as *The Gospel of Life*. This document, written by Pope St. John Paul II, reaffirmed the Church's constant teaching on the value and inviolability of every human life. It also addressed modern day threats to life, including abortion, artificial reproduction, contraception, capital punishment, euthanasia, sterilization, and suicide.

Issued on March 25, 1995, *The Gospel of Life* was prophetically put forward on this great Marian feast, the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord. Today's celebration of the Annunciation—as recalled in our Gospel reading—commemorates the visit of the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary to inform her that she was to be the mother of our Savior. After giving her consent to God's word, Mary conceives Jesus in her womb and becomes the mother of God by the power of the Holy Spirit. Christ becomes incarnate in the womb of a woman and the Word is made flesh.

In modern times, this feast day has taken on special meaning in the Church's efforts to protect and defend human life. Scientific advances have allowed us to confirm that life begins at conception. This solemnity helps us to recognize the gift of new life from its very beginning. It calls us to reflect on how we are to care for, protect, and welcome new life, as the Blessed Mother did for the Christ child.

In the conclusion of *The Gospel of Life*, Pope St. John Paul II offers a profound reflection on Mary, the Mother of God and the Annunciation. This homily is based largely on these reflections.

In the story of the Annunciation we see that “the one who accepted ‘Life’ in the name of all and for the sake of all was *Mary*, the Virgin Mother; she is thus most closely and personally associated with the *Gospel of life*. Mary’s consent at the Annunciation and her motherhood stand at the very beginning of the mystery of life which Christ came to bestow on humanity.”<sup>2</sup>

Mary, in becoming the Mother of God, becomes the “mother of all who are reborn to life.”<sup>3</sup> In a similar way, we also understand the Church to be our mother. By contemplating Mary’s motherhood, the Church “discovers the meaning of her own motherhood.”<sup>4</sup> Mary’s experience as the Mother of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, gives us the “model of how life should be welcomed and cared for.”<sup>5</sup>

Like Mary, pregnant with the Christ-child, the Church “bears within herself the Savior of the world.”<sup>6</sup> The Church “is called to offer Christ to the world, giving men and women new birth into God’s own life.”<sup>7</sup> But this great mission of the Church was only made possible by the motherhood of Mary, who bore Christ to the world through her very womb. Mary is therefore the model of the Church.

The motherhood of the Church is only realized through the labor pains of childbirth, meaning that the Church is “in constant tension with the forces of evil”<sup>8</sup> and performs her saving mission amid sin, suffering, injustice, and death. But, “like the Church, Mary too had to live her motherhood amid suffering.”<sup>9</sup> Her own heart

was pierced. Mary’s “‘yes’ spoken on the day of the Annunciation reaches full maturity on the day of the Cross,”<sup>10</sup> when Mary gives her Son over to death, and becomes the Mother of the Church.

We know that the life of the Christ-child was threatened long before Calvary. Mary and Joseph had to flee to Egypt to protect the life of the infant Jesus from Herod’s plans to kill him. Mary “helps the Church to realize that life is always at the center of a great struggle between good and evil, between light and darkness.”<sup>11</sup> The vulnerable infant Jesus represents “every person, every child, especially every helpless baby whose life is threatened.”<sup>12</sup> Because Christ in taking on flesh has united Himself with every human person, we come to understand that “rejection of human life, in whatever form that rejection takes, is really a rejection of Christ”<sup>13</sup> himself.

Despite the great number of threats to human life in our world today, we still have hope. Pope St. John Paul II highlights the angel’s announcement to Mary, which “is framed by these reassuring words: ‘Do not be afraid, Mary’ and ‘with God nothing will be impossible’ (Lk 1:30, 37). The whole of the Virgin Mother’s life is in fact pervaded by the certainty that God is near to her and that he accompanies her with his providential care.”<sup>14</sup> Therefore, “*Mary is a living word of comfort for the Church* [emphasis added] in her struggle against death. Showing us the Son, the Church assures us that in him the forces of death have already been defeated.”<sup>15</sup> The battle for life has already been won. By his blood, Christ has won salvation for us.

So, we must look to Mary and entrust the cause of life to her tender care and intercession. We are called to be a people of life and for life. We ask the Blessed Mother, through her intercession, to “grant that all who believe in [her] Son may proclaim the Gospel of life with honesty and love to the people of our time.”<sup>16</sup>

May we answer Pope St. John Paul II’s “pressing appeal addressed to each and every person, in the name of God: *respect, protect, love and serve life, every human life!*” (emphasis added).<sup>17</sup>



1 Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995), 105.

2 Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, 102.

3 *Ibid.*

4 *Ibid.*

5 *Ibid.*

6 Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, 103

7 *Ibid.*

8 *Ibid.*

9 *Ibid.*

10 *Ibid.*

11 Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, 104

12 *Ibid.*

13 *Ibid.*

14 Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, 105.

15 *Ibid.*

16 *Ibid.*

17 Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, 5.

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## SAMPLE ACTIVITY

### Blessing of a Child in the Womb

The Solemnity of the Annunciation is a perfect occasion to offer the *Blessing of a Child in the Womb* to expectant parents in your parish community. The celebration of the Annunciation commemorates the visit of the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary to inform her that she was to be the mother of our Savior. After giving her consent to God's word, Mary conceives Jesus in her womb and becomes the mother of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

In modern times, this feast day has taken on special meaning in Respect Life ministry. Scientific advances have allowed us to confirm that life begins at conception. This solemnity helps us to recognize the gift of new life from its very beginning. It calls us to reflect on how we are to care for, protect, and welcome new life, as the Blessed Mother did for the Christ child.

Because the solemnity often falls during the week, we recommend that parishes offer this blessing during Sunday Masses the weekend prior in anticipation of this important feast of the Church.

This blessing may take place within Mass (after the Prayer of the Faithful), as an additional solemn blessing at the end of Mass, or within the context of a brief celebration of the Word of God, by a priest or deacon.

A free downloadable PDF version of the *Rite for the Blessing of a Child in the Womb*, ordering information for a bound copy, and supplemental information can also be found online at [usccb.org/blessing-in-the-womb](https://usccb.org/blessing-in-the-womb).

## Materials

- ◆ Copy of the *Rite for the Blessing of a Child in the Womb*

## Directions

1. Contact your pastor, and ask if he would consider offering the *Blessing of a Child in the Womb* near the Solemnity of the Annunciation. We recommend including it within the Sunday Masses on the weekend prior in anticipation of the solemnity. This allows the greatest number of parishioners to participate and highlights the humanity of all unborn children. You could also consider suggesting just one Mass at which to offer the blessing. However, your pastor may have reasons to offer the blessing at another time to best suit the needs of your particular community.
2. If your pastor agrees to offer the blessing, ask whether he needs you to order or download a copy of the Rite of Blessing. Make sure that he receives any needed materials well in advance. Perhaps he would appreciate you downloading and sending him the PDF version while he waits for the booklet to be delivered.
3. Once a date and time for the blessing have been confirmed, plan to announce the opportunity to receive the blessing to parishioners one to two weeks in advance. Use the sample announcements to include an invitation in the bulletin and share it in any announcements before or after Mass. If your parish utilizes social media, share the news on any relevant social media accounts.
4. You may want to consider providing an email address or phone number for RSVPs, so you have some sense for parishioner participation. If the blessing will be offered at multiple Masses, consider asking expectant parents who would like to receive the blessing to let you know which Mass they plan to attend. You may want to confirm that at least one expectant mother will be present for any Mass in which you plan for the blessing to be offered (especially in parishes without many expectant parents).
5. During the week in which the blessing is planned, touch base with your pastor once more. *Ask if there is anything you can do to help.*