

Advent at The Well

Week Two: Annunciation

Luke 1.26-38 (New International Version)

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail."

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

A Breath Prayer.

May your word
Be fulfilled in me.

"Gabriel's Message"

Basque folk carol, 13th century

The Angel Gabriel from heaven came,
his wings as drifted snow, his eyes as flame;
"All hail," said he, "thou lowly maiden Mary,
most highly favoured lady."

Gloria!

"For known a blessed Mother thou shalt be,
all generations laud and honour thee,
thy son shall be Emmanuel, by seers foretold;
most highly favoured lady."

Gloria!

Then gentle Mary meekly bowed her head,
"To me be as it pleaseth God," she said,
"My soul shall laud and magnify his holy name":
most highly favoured lady.

Gloria!

Of her, Emmanuel, the Christ was born
in Bethlehem, all on a Christmas morn,
and Christian folk throughout the world will
ever say
most highly favoured lady.

Gloria!

An Advent Benediction

Christ the Sun of Righteousness shine upon you,
scatter the darkness from before your path, and
make you ready to meet him when he comes in
glory; and the blessing of God almighty, the
Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be upon
you, upon those whom you love, and those
whom you would pray for today and always.
Amen.

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“Gabriel’s Annunciation” by Jan Richardson

For a moment
I hesitated
on the threshold.
For the space
of a breath
I paused,
unwilling to disturb
her last ordinary moment,
knowing that the next step
would cleave her life:
that this day
would slice her story
in two,
dividing all the days before
from all the ones
to come.

The artists would later
depict the scene:
Mary dazzled
by the archangel,
her head bowed
in humble assent,
awed by the messenger
who condescended
to leave paradise
to bestow such an honor
upon a woman, and mortal.

Yet I tell you
it was I who was dazzled,
I who found myself agape
when I came upon her—
reading, at the loom, in the kitchen,
I cannot now recall;
only that the woman before me—
blessed and full of grace
long before I called her so—
shimmered with how completely
she inhabited herself,
inhabited the space around her,
inhabited the moment
that hung between us.
I wanted to save her
from what I had been sent
to say.

Yet when the time came,
when I had stammered
the invitation

(history would not record
the sweat on my brow,
the pounding of my heart;
would not note
that I said
Do not be afraid
to myself as much as
to her)
it was she
who saved me—
her first deliverance—
her *Let it be*
not just declaration
to the Divine
but a word of solace,
of soothing,
of benediction
for the angel
in the doorway
who would hesitate
one last time—
just for the space
of a breath
torn from his chest—
before wrenching himself away
from her radiant consent,
her beautiful and
awful yes.

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