

ANNUNCIATION 2021

Do you want the good news first or the bad news? A familiar phrase. I have heard it and I have asked it and you probably have also. The answers have fallen about equally divided between the 2 choices. The personality of the person probably figures largely in the answer.

But where on this continuum would you place the news that comes out of left field – the completely unexpected. News that it is so startling that it is almost other worldly.

How do you respond to a question delivered by an angel? Maybe I should back up and say how do react to an angel appearing in your home even before any questions or conversations commence?

Then the words – fear not – or in more modern translations – do not be afraid. Gabriel explains his appearance and then comes the biggest question of all time. We do not know how long it took Mary to give her answer, but the impression is that it did not take a long time. I have taken longer on much lesser decisions.

She said yes and the world changed. It shifted on its axis. Nothing would ever be the same again.

Over the centuries, the Annunciation has been portrayed countless times in art. In “Holiness and the Feminine Spirit” the sacred art of Janet McKenzie portrays a Mary that is very different. Her portraits of Mary are not stagnant. They encompass every emotion known to humankind. They are not cardboard figures – these are real women with real feelings.

The Rev. Canon Mary Haddad writes about Janet McKenzie’s painting of the Annunciation. A story where the word becomes flesh. Mary must say the word that will bring the Word to earth – that will join human and divine. *Let it be so.*

Rev. Haddad points out that in hundreds of portrayals of this event, Gabriel and Mary do not connect and in some Gabriel is not even present – he is only there in our imagination. Is this not strange and disturbing? God’s love needs human contact – it needs to be embodied. After all, that was the question put to Mary.

Janet McKenzie's painting portrays a different encounter. Mary's head is bent – she is looking inside herself – considering the request. Gabriel stands close to Mary – he is touching her – and his wing enfolds her. Heaven and earth touch. The angel is not abandoning her at this difficult and momentous time. He is there to give support as she ponders his extraordinary request.

Would you not want some contact, some reassurance, some emotional support in such a moment – a moment that changed the world.

The Annunciation is a call to step out of a comfort zone. To make connections – to not stand apart but to reach out to all who need us – need our help – need contact with us – need us to embody the love of God. God's love cannot stay hidden and His Word cannot be silent. They need to be embodied and taken into the world.

Just as Mary bore the Word that became flesh, we are also called to embody the words of our faith. To make the words a part of our being and then not to hold onto them but to take them into the world and share them.

This is the story of the birth of a word – the Word in fact. The Word from the beginning of John's gospel. The Word that became flesh – that was both human and divine. Just as creation began with the words – let there be light – so Mary said – let it be so. She gave permission for the Word to become flesh.

With thanks for inspiration from the Rev. Canon Mary Haddad in "Holiness and the Feminine Spirit" by Janet McKenzie