

2015 Advent Retreat in Daily Living
Session 3: Annunciations and Responses to Annunciations

Suggested prayer for the week:

Spend at least a day on each of the three scripture passages – the two annunciations and the visitation.

Then take a day with each of the two poems.

Finally, take a day to review the blessings of the retreat experience with the “Gathering of the Graces.”

The Annunciation to Joseph

Matthew 1:18-25

Now this is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the holy Spirit. Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly. Such was his intention when, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means “God is with us.” When Joseph woke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home. He had no relations with her until she bore a son, and he named him Jesus.

The Annunciation To Mary

Luke 1:26-38

In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary.

And coming to her, he said, "Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you."

But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.

Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?"

And the angel said to her in reply, "The holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.

And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God." Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Annunciation
Denise Levertov

'Hail, space for the uncontained God'
From the Agathistos Hymn, Greece, VIC

We know the scene: the room, variously furnished,
almost always a lectern, a book; always the tall lily.
Arrived on solemn grandeur of great wings,
the angelic ambassador, standing or hovering,
whom she acknowledges, a guest.

But we are told of meek obedience.
No one mentions courage.
The engendering Spirit did not enter her without consent.
God waited.
She was free to accept or to refuse,
Choice integral to humanness.

Aren't there annunciations of one sort or another
in most lives?
Some unwillingly undertake great destinies,
enact them in sullen pride, uncomprehending.
More often
those moments when roads of light and storm
open from darkness in a man or woman,
are turned away from
in dread, in a wave of weakness, in despair
and with relief.
Ordinary lives continue.
God does not smite them.
But the gates close, the pathway vanishes.

She had been a child who played, ate, slept
like any other child – but unlike others,
wept only for pity, laughed
in joy not triumph.

Compassion and intelligence
fused in her, indivisible.

Called to a destiny more momentous
than any in all of Time,
she did not quail, only asked
a simple, 'How can this be?'
and gravely, courteously,
took to heart the angel's reply,
perceiving instantly
the astounding ministry she was offered:

to bear in her womb
Infinite weight and lightness; to carry
in hidden, finite inwardness,
nine months of Eternity; to contain
in slender vase of being,
the sum of power –
in narrow flesh,
the sum of light.
Then bring to birth,
push out into air, a Man-child
needing, like any other,
milk and love –

but who was God.

This was the minute no one speaks of,
where she could still refuse.

A breath unbreathed,
Spirit,
suspended,
waiting.

She did not cry, "I cannot, I am not worthy,"
nor "I have not the strength."
She did not submit with gritted teeth, raging, coerced.
Bravest of all humans,
consent illumed her.
The room filled with its light,
the lily glowed in it,
and the iridescent wings.
Consent,
courage unparalleled,
opened her utterly.

I Did Say Yes

(Paul Mariani)

Thou heardst me, truer than tongue, confess...

Gerard Manley Hopkins

The barely prayable prayer as the words fall away,
Words unguessed or unguessable, soft silence only,
Penetrant silence, the pit, then something stirring...
Importunate, unquenchable mind, astray
Or aswarm, attuned for odd moments after, then
Drifting. Then a lull & a lifting, then self flickering back,
As the parched sunflower turns towards the sun...

A woman kneels, head bent forward, each cell attendant
Upon the flame which, consuming, does not consume,
But gently enwraps, caressing, filling herself with itself,
The burning clouds lingering, then hovering off, like
Mist off a mountain, here in this kitchen, this cell, here,
Where the timeless crosses with time, this chiasmus,
Infinity & now, nowhere & always, this cosmos, this fresh-

Found dimension, all attention gone over now, as flame
Flickers and whispers, all care turning to ash, all fear,
All consequence even, all given over, ah, lover to lover
Now, saying yes, yes, whatever you will, my dear,
Yes echoing down the long halls of time, yes,
In spite of all disappointment, of the death of Love even,
The barely sayable yes again, yes again, yes I will. Yes.

The Visitation

During those days Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, "Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled."

(Luke 1:39-45)

Gathering of the Graces
Reflection on My Retreat Experience

I am present to God, my creator, who has journeyed with me throughout these weeks of Advent prayer. I am present to the Risen Jesus living and growing within me.

1. What am I most grateful for as a result of this retreat?

2. With the help of the Spirit, I let my memory wander over the events of these weeks and ask:
 - a. Where did I feel drawn to God?

 - b. What new understanding do I now have about God and the ways in which God relates to me? What new understanding have I come to about myself? What new understanding have I come to about my relationship with others?

 - c. What is the most significant grace given to me during this retreat experience?

3. How am I looking forward to the future?
 - a. Do I feel drawn to a decision or action as a result of this retreat?

 - b. What difference will the graces of this retreat make in my life?

I pray to respond to God and to the graces of this experience with greater faith, hope, love, humility, courage.

In wonder and awe I express gratitude to God for the gift of this retreat. I allow God to thank me for my openness and generosity during this retreat.