

## Reflection: Feast of the Annunciation, March 25, 2033

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### Prayer

*We hail you, O mysterious and Holy Trinity who has gathered us together in celebration of our Holy Mother's Annunciation. We hail you, Mary, the God bearer, . . . the dwelling place of the One who cannot be contained. Mother and Virgin, we hail you for the sake of the one whom the holy Gospels call 'blessed,' and for the one who 'comes in the name of the Lord.' Amen. Prayer by Cyril of Alexandria, (Abbreviated) preached at the council of Ephesus in 431:*

We are told of meek obedience. . . .

The engendering Spirit  
did not enter her without consent.

God waited.  
She was free  
to accept or to refuse. (Abbreviated)

*In Denise Levertov's poem **Annunciation** we are invited to ponder how the gospel event we celebrate today was like for Mary. The only human witness is Mary herself, yet the story comes down to us as absolutely central to the Gospel proclamation, that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among" (Jn. 1) us as a human person. Given this fact, it is crucial that we truly understand the story that Luke relates to us? To reach this understanding we shall need to receive the story via our imaginations, as the early Church commentators certainly did.*

We will want to begin with the realization that Luke was not writing history, nor even science. Rather, he was writing theology. And the task of theology is to explore who God is, and as Christians, to proclaim the story of God as Emmanuel, God as dwelling among us in human form.

When we imaginatively explore the story, we encounter a very young woman who is confused, and asking "How can this be?" Her feelings and attitude are not unlike the response of any of us to startling and unbelievable news. As the poem intimates, like us, it took time for Mary to find a measure of acceptance.

As for Luke, our writer, he is attempting not to explain a virgin birth, but to proclaim that Jesus was God's Son. It was the only way he really could explain it, if indeed what he writes is meant to be an explanation. Perhaps Luke is simply stating the obvious of how a human being comes to life. The story is a proclamation that God chose to reach into the womb of Mary and create within her a new life. Something similar after all is hinted at in Psalm 139 when the psalmist proclaims: "you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb".

Fundamentally, miraculously, Luke is not primarily explaining a virgin birth, although a virgin birth is his assumption, but rather proclaiming that God is doing something new in this event.

As the story unfolds before our ears, the miracle of the incarnation, the story of God being made flesh is at center stage! So, the very heart of our faith, and the theological point of the story, is God's miraculous and real presence issued through the acceptance and womb of Mary, that brings forth the life of Jesus, God's Son. To state this imaginatively once again in another poem entitled *Annunciation* by Jean Valentine (1934-2020)

I saw my soul become flesh  
breaking open . . . .

my life breaking open  
no one to contain it    my  
pelvis thinning out into God.

The story of the annunciation is of course also *our* story – the story of *our* confusion and disbelief when God appears in our lives in wondrous and fearful ways. How many of us have received startling news and been left with disbelief and confusion? No doubt there have been times in our own lives when we too can say: "How can this be?" But can we also say "be it unto me according to your Word?" To listen to our first poet, *Denise Levertov*, once again:

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.

A human life is a series of Annunciations – some wonderful, others devastating. In each we too are called to respond – with thankfulness, when the announcement is good, with acceptance and faithfulness when troubling and fearful, expecting, in faith and in God's good providence, whatever the outcome, that all things will be well, because God's love is God's meaning in all things." (Julian of Norwich). And so we too, in our acceptance and faith can join Mary in our own God bearing, as we receive this sacrament of God's presence, and venture out into the world with a revelation of God's love for us and for the world.