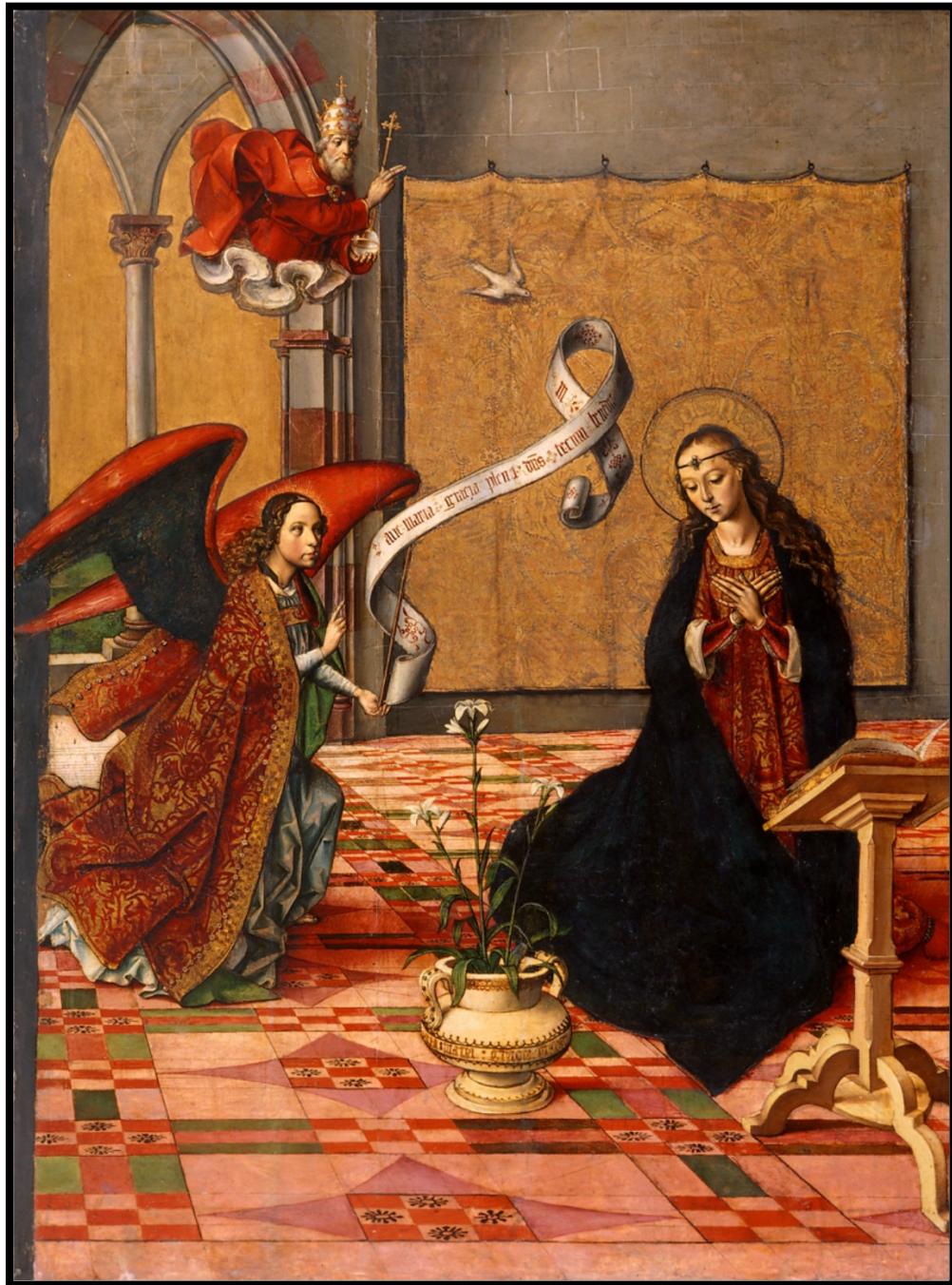

GANZ - THIRD MEDITATION FOR LENT 2025



Annunciation (1482) by Pedro Berruguete (1450-1500)¹ in Iglesia de Santa Eulalia de Paredes de Nava²

Dan Fogelberg, “Leader of the Band” (1981): “His gentle means of sculpting souls took me years to understand.”

C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (1945): “You cannot love a fellow creature fully till you love God.”

Scripture – Luke 1:26-38 – the Annunciation to Mary –

²⁹She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, ³⁰but the angel said to her, ‘Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God’s favour.³

Instead of using the Gospel for the third Sunday of Lent, I have chosen to use the Gospel proclaimed in church on the Tuesday after this Sunday, on March 25th, the annual celebration of the solemnity feast of the Annunciation.

Curiously, this feast gets its name from the *conversation* initiated by God through the Archangel Gabriel with the young girl of Nazareth, Maryam by name. But there is nothing in the name “annunciation” that indicates what *came* of that conversation, or better, *who* came to exist in the girl’s womb after she had considered and then freely offered herself to God.⁴ It is interesting that the feast should take its name not from the

¹ By Isabel Mateo (2003) in *Grove Art* (Oxford) – **Pedro Berruguete (1450-1500)**, Spanish painter. According to some writers, he was painter to the Catholic monarchs Ferdinand II, King of Aragon, and Isabella, Queen of Castile, and to Philip the Fair (later Philip I, King of Castile from 1506) before his wife, Joanna ‘the Mad’, became Queen of Castile in 1504. Between 1470 and 1475 Berruguete executed the altarpiece of *St Helen* (Paredes de Nava, S Juan), which demonstrates his mastery of oil-painting techniques. ... Berruguete returned to Spain c. 1480 and, despite some assimilation of Italian art, continued to paint in a Hispano-Flemish style. Presumably this reflected his training in Castile, where painting was dominated by the Flemish naturalism of the disciples of Jan van Eyck. Berruguete was an excellent colourist and combined techniques learnt from Piero della Francesca with an interest in van Eyck’s perspectival and light effects.

² To zoom in on the painting for the sake of seeing it better, go to:
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:StaEulalia-Berruguete-Anunciacion.jpg>.

³ [The New Jerusalem Bible](#) (New York; London; Toronto; Sydney; Auckland: Doubleday, 1990), Lk 1:29-30.

⁴ The Tradition might well, and perhaps more significantly, have named this feast day the *Solemnity of the Incarnation*, bringing full attention towards Who it was who became flesh in the womb of Mary at the moment her “Yes” was given.

result of that conversation but from all that happened *before* that young girl, and on behalf of human beings, offered her "Yes" – ²⁹She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean⁵.

It was as if the Tradition was more impressed that God, who might do as He pleased, would exercise such courtesy towards us by *asking* for our help, asking one of the least of us, as the girl of Nazareth understood herself to be:

Luke 1 (NRSV):

"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord;
⁴⁷ my spirit rejoices in God my savior.
⁴⁸ For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness;⁶

Denise Levertov, "Annunciation" (the closing lines):

Bravest of all humans,
consent illumined her.
The room filled with light,
the lily glowed in it,
and the iridescent wings.

Consent
courage unparalleled,
opened her utterly.

March 25th is the day of the conception of the second Divine Person as a human in Mary's womb, already the God-Man. It makes sense that nine months later, on December 25th, He was born.

Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art;
dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart. (John Wesley, 1744)

Unlike Easter, which is a moveable feast (on a different day each year according to the time of the first full Moon after the Vernal Equinox), Christmas is a not a moveable feast, because of its association with the conception of Jesus in Mary's womb on March 25th. The feast follows Nature; coordinates with it. Grace builds on nature.

⁵ [The New Jerusalem Bible](#) (New York; London; Toronto; Sydney; Auckland: Doubleday, 1990), Lk 1:29.

⁶ [New American Bible](#), Revised Edition. (Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011), Lk 1:46–48.

We consider that famous tag line in the theology of St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) – *gratia non tollit naturam, sed perficit*, or “Grace does not destroy/neutralize nature but builds on it / fulfills its potential.”

We notice how these dates are tied to the seasons (of the northern hemisphere). Jesus' *conception* happened immediately after the death of Winter on one of the first days of emergent Spring. And Jesus' *birth* – the Light of the world - happened just a few days after the longest dark of the year - the Winter solstice. Grace builds on nature; the later divine Gift interpreted by the season in which it appears. We imagine that the Trinity did this deliberately, coordinating their redemptive actions in Christ with rhythms in Nature, the rhythms that the Trinity set in place when they created all things from nothing, *ex nihilo*. Grace piled on grace – **John 1:**¹⁶ From his fullness we have all received, *grace upon grace*.⁷ Grace builds on nature.

Finally, it has been taught from very early in the Tradition that the original Good Friday, the day *when Jesus Christ was crucified and died*, happened also on March 25th. And so, the Incarnation and the Redemption coincide with the birth of Spring (in the northern hemisphere). And for J.R.R. Tolkien readers, it was on March 25th, inside the chronology of the *Lord of the Rings*, that Gollum fell into the volcano on Mount Doom, destroying himself and the One Ring, which brought to ruin Sauron, the Dark Lord (Third Age, year 3019). Key moments in his great epic Tolkien tied to specific dates on the Christian calendar and to the created order of the natural world.⁸

The Painting - Observations and Insights –

The artist paints the moment when the Archangel had just appeared, speaking the famous greeting – see it there written in Latin on the scroll unfurled in the air between them - **Luke 1:**²⁸ *Et ingressus ad eam dixit: «Ave, gratia plena, Dominus tecum»*.⁹ These are the first words spoken by God to a human being in the New Testament.

The Archangel must have just landed, because his/her¹⁰ wings are still outstretched, not yet tucked in. This suggests *urgency*, the Archangel needing to speak divine words that

⁷ [The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version](#) (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989), Jn 1:16.

⁸ Another example: the great Fellowship of the nine, brought together and commissioned at the Council of Rivendell, set off on its great quest to destroy the One Ring – “one ring to rule them all” – early in the morning on December 25th, which on our calendar is Christmas Day.

⁹ [Nova Vulgata Bibliorum Sacrorum Editio](#), Editio Typica Altera. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1986), Lk 1:28.

¹⁰ Angels, lacking physical bodies (unless they choose to appear as such to us – in this regard, remember how capable we human beings are of appearing to others as we are not) do not have gender.

he/she is barely able to keep unspoken. That an Archangel could “blurt”¹¹ words is amusing, but it offers the insight that even Angels, created as we are but who are of a higher order of being, can get excited too.

We are surprised that Mary does not appear to be startled at the dramatic appearance of Heaven in her oratory¹² – her place of prayerful study of the Scriptures (see the lectern and the book). I would be startled, wouldn’t you?

Instead, Mary is a center of inner stillness so practiced and so profound that we wonder whether this remarkable girl had not often “visited” Heaven in her contemplation of God’s word. Heaven, or better “on Earth and it is in Heaven”, was an experience familiar to her. *Familiarity with God* is a feature of spiritual maturity established in high degree.

And notice how Mary is not looking up toward this astonishing and beautiful and breathtaking Archangel – how could she not look up? – but instead, with eyes downcast, she listens to *what* he/she is saying and *how* he/she is saying it. This suggests that Mary had cultivated a habit of discernment – a gift of the Holy Spirit (you see the little bird there). Appearances can be deceiving, and so Mary is concentrating, listening for the “ring of truth” in the voice that she hears.

1 John 4 (NJB):

¹ My dear friends,
not every spirit is to be trusted,
but test the spirits to see whether they are from God,
for many false prophets are at large in the world.

² This is the proof of the spirit of God:
any spirit which acknowledges Jesus Christ, come in human nature,
is from God. ¹³

Mary’s self-possession and stillness suggests that we are dealing with a formidable

However, I find it impossible for me to refer to Angels as “it”, because Angels *are* personal beings, which the giving of personal names to certain of the Angels in the Bible emphasizes: Gabriel, Raphael, Michael.

¹¹ The *Oxford English Dictionary* at “**to blurt**” – **3.a. - 1573** – *transitive* (commonly with *out*): To utter abruptly, and as if by a sudden impulse; to burst out with.

¹² The *Oxford English Dictionary* at “**oratory**” – **1.a. - a1382** – A place of prayer; a room or building for private worship, *esp.*, in the Christian Church, a small chapel or shrine in or attached to a house, monastery, church, etc. Also, *figurative*.

¹³ [The New Jerusalem Bible](#) (New York; London; Toronto; Sydney; Auckland: Doubleday, 1990), 1 Jn 4:1-2.

personality, a girl not to be taken lightly, a person strong enough to put even an Archangel to the test! She wonders, "Are you really what you seem?"

Finally, let us attend to the gestures we see.

I do not understand the inner experience that would cause me, like Mary, to make that gesture: her two hands crossed over her chest. If she were naked, then the gesture is an obvious one.

C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (1945), page 51 – I cannot now remember whether she was naked or clothed. If she were naked, then it must have been the almost visible penumbra of her courtesy and joy which produces in my memory the illusion of a great and shining train that followed her across the happy grass. If she were clothed, then the illusion of nakedness is doubtless due to the clarity with which her innermost spirit shone through the clothes. For clothes in that country are not a disguise: the spiritual body lives along each thread and turns them into living organs. A robe or a crown is there as much one of the wearer's features as a lip or an eye. But I have forgotten. And only partly do I remember the unbearable beauty of her face.

But here it seems a protective gesture that she makes to "slow down", if you will, the effect that the sheer beauty and *realness* of the Archangel is having on her.

The Archangel's gestures are open: the left hand supporting the staff that holds up the divine message; the right hand pointing towards the message, which Mary cannot see because she is not looking in that direction.

Finally, the Father who comes from Heaven holds in His left hand a symbol of governance – the globe of the world over which stands the Cross¹⁴ – which soon will be placed in the left hand of the Boy who would be King; and his right hand shows the two-finger sign which in Christian imagery stands for the two natures of Christ: divine and human. In other words, the Father and the Holy Spirit are, at that very moment, poised to "beget" in the womb of Mary the two-natured Christ.

¹⁴ Wikipedia: The *globus cruciger* (Latin for 'cross-bearing orb'), also known as *stavroforos sphaira* (Greek: σταυροφόρος σφαίρα) or "the orb and cross", is an orb surmounted by a cross. It has been a Christian symbol of authority since the Middle Ages, used on coins, in iconography, and with a sceptre as royal regalia. The cross laid over the globe represents Christ's dominion over the world, literally held in the hand of a worthy earthly ruler. **In the iconography of Western art, when Christ himself holds the globe, he is called *Salvator Mundi* (Latin for 'Saviour of the World').** For instance, the 16th-century Infant Jesus of Prague statue holds a *globus cruciger* in this manner.

Prayer: "O God, who willed that your Word should take on the reality of human flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mary, grant, we pray, that we, who confess our Redeemer to be God and human, may merit to become partakers even in His divine nature."