

The First Joyful Mystery

The Annunciation



John Collier painted this Annunciation in 2000 for the Church of Saint Gabriel in McKinney, Texas. Isn't it wonderful that someone is interested in painting the Annunciation in a contemporary setting? This indicates that Mr. Collier understands that the Mysteries of God - the bright closeness of God - is for *every* age in *every* place - that these things are forever and not moments lost in time. What makes the painting so reflective is that Mr. Collier has included some traditional elements, like the lily placed on the porch, that the angel has wings and is wearing a robe, that Mary is dressed in blue. But there are other elements that are surprising and delightful: that Mary is wearing saddle shoes which suggests she is quite young, that there is a breeze against her dress reminding us of the breath of God in the story of our creation, that the light indicates it is morning (*the start of something new*), that the neighborhood is one we might know from our own American experience. We might read the gospel account of the Annunciation before praying this decade (*Luke 1:26-38*).



Our Father, Who art in heaven...

Coming from heaven, an angel must be terrifying. And so in kindness, Gabriel said to Mary, *Don't be afraid*. Why would I be frightened at the appearance of an angel? Perhaps fearful of what God might ask of me?

Hail Mary, full of grace...

As the angel appeared to Mary and invited her *not to fear*, I'm to think of the other angel, at the end of the gospel-story, at the tomb of Easter morning. Already the gospel is getting me ready for the Resurrection of Jesus: Love that refuses to lose me!

Hail Mary, full of grace...

I should acknowledge that Mary likely had her own life-plans. But she put these aside as God revealed His urgent request. As I ponder my own life-plans, am I open, Mary-like, to what God surely has in mind for me?

Hail Mary, full of grace...

I must remember too that Mary is going to have to tell Joseph of her pregnancy and that the expected baby is not his! Talk about trusting that things will work out; that God is in charge!

Hail Mary, full of grace...

The baby *will be great*, the angel told Mary. He'll be great in having followers down through the ages. He'll be great in his miracles and in his teaching that can turn a life around. He'll be great in His promises and in how far He'll go to get us back for Himself. And I want to be great too: great in love.

Hail Mary, full of grace...

The baby will be called *Emmanuel*, the angel told Mary. Is this like a nick-name? The name means: *God is with us*. The best any friend can do in the sorrows, struggles, disasters and joys of life, is to *be with me*.

Hail Mary, full of grace...

The name Jesus means: *Yahweh saves*. Yahweh is the Hebrew people's name for God. But saves us from what? Saved from the downward spiral of wrong choosing that seems to have been going on since soon after humans were created. Saved from our worst selves. Saved from our ultimate undoing. Saved from death's hold on me.

Hail Mary, full of grace...

Often in pictures of the Annunciation scene the painter places a lily near Mary: a symbol of her purity. *Blessed are the pure of heart*, Jesus says, *they will see God*. Do I know that I can see God, that I can reach out and even touch God? That's not nonsense. But it will never happen if I don't first have a pure heart.

Hail Mary, full of grace...

Saint Augustine wrote: *Before Mary conceived Jesus in her womb, she conceived Him in her heart*. Oh, I want a heart like Mary's: all YES to Jesus!

Hail Mary, full of grace...

A disciple isn't just a follower. The word *follower* can connote a weak tag-a-long, someone with nothing better to do. But a Christian disciple is the one who pursues Jesus in the adventure of obedience and friendship. This Christ-Adventure promises joy, like nothing to be found elsewhere.

Hail Mary, full of grace...

Glory be to the Father...