

Sermon notes

Fourth Sunday of Advent

[Luke 1:26-38](#)

[Canticle 15](#) Magnificat, Mary's song

"Greetings, favored one, The Lord is with you." The translation of the Message reads: "You're beautiful with God's beauty, Beautiful inside and out! God be with you." Mary wonders what kind of greeting this might be. She knows God in her life, but this encounter with a messenger from God causes her to wonder, to fear. The angel assures her and says, "Do not be afraid Mary." "You will conceive in your womb and bear a son..."

Mary's awe is both a wondering at how this is possible and how she can live this disrupted life. Mary responds to the Angel Gabriel, "Here I am, the servant of the Lord. Let it be with me according to your word." God enters her life in an unexpected way, and she says yes. It is a yes that will impact others and bring God's saving power into the world.

What would it be if we followed Mary and responded with "here I am" when God enters into our lives unexpected and unplanned? The agenda is God's not Mary's and in the prophetic tradition Mary answers yes, God—I open my life, all of me to your love. The angel has spoken, "Nothing will be impossible with God."

Throughout the centuries artists have portrayed this moment of greeting and transformational change in many ways. We may wonder what is this event that brought God into the world. Perhaps the classic is the angel with wings that meets Mary, quietly reading, rather than at her chores. The message is God comes where we are, and then declares, "Be not Afraid."

Importantly in this story from Luke, Mary is not alone. Elizabeth her older relative, thought to be unable to have a child is also expecting. When the two women greet each other, they celebrate their impossible pregnancies and the mystery of God acting in the world. "Be not afraid." Their love, our love, brings more love into the world.



An image of the Angel Gabriel greeting Mary by Fra Angelico in 1434. The holy spirit, a dove, is descending upon Mary.



El Greco, The Annunciation 1600 Faithful Mary is seen reading The Holy Scriptures. The Holy Spirit appears as a dove and light; the angel carries Lilies, a symbol of purity and also of resurrection.



Detail Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth; Saint Martin Nohant-Vicq France, 1135-1140



Annunciation and Visitation Cathedral d'Amiens 1930

Color and splendor and telling of the story of God in the world in the stained-glass windows in the Cathedral of d 'Amiens in France.



Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth Lauren Wright Pittman 2018

Pittman's desire to communicate light and life in the contemporary image startles us with the young girl and the older woman. Pittman writes, *I wanted to depict the creative energy, communication, and power that was taking place in Mary and Elizabeth's wombs in this moment. Mary's womb swirls with the knitting together of the One through whom all things came into being, while Elizabeth's womb radiates joy with the leaping of the one who will spend his life directing attention, awe, and reverence to the One in Mary's womb.* The encounter empowers Mary to speak with joy. She declares that God is acting, turning the expected upside down. God "has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away. God is breaking into our world, even now asking us to be bearers of his love for all of God's people.

