

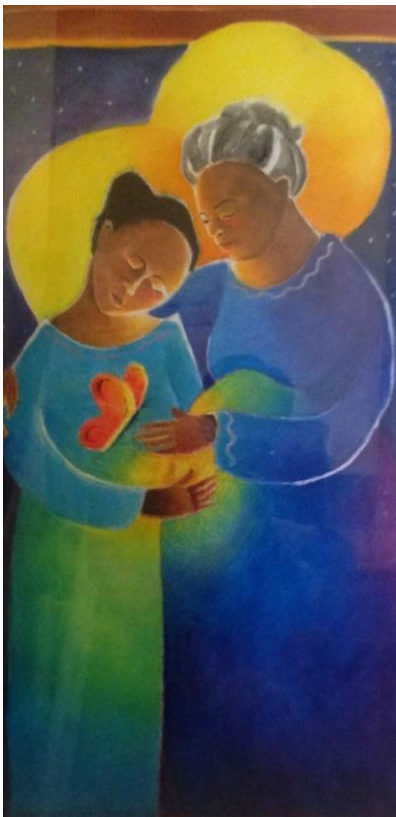
The time is almost here. A girl, a young teen, who grew up in a poor family says “yes” to God. Where was she when the Angel Gabriel spoke? Was she saying her traditional daily prayers? Was she doing sewing chores for her mother who was baking bread? Was she sitting for a moment, gazing out into a small garden, wondering what the future would hold for her?

Luke tells us the story of Mary, carefully set as Mary speaks as a prophet and declares that God is among us and that she is a messenger, bearing the one who is to come. She is being portrayed in Luke as a person of faith to follow or imitate.

In a radical moment of hospitality, Elizabeth welcomes her young cousin who is unmarried and pregnant. Then something happens. Elizabeth “sees” Mary and her child. Elizabeth witnesses as family, friend, faithful woman and elder to God acting in the world. She acknowledges God acting in her, and her unborn son also “leaps for joy” to meet Jesus who is coming into the world. They are the first witnesses to the Christ coming into the world. This a paradigm for Luke; to meet the Christ evokes a response of faith.



1135-1140 Saint-Martin (Church: Nohant-Vicq, France)



In this contemporary picture of Elizabeth and Mary we see the old Elizabeth who tells Mary that the child Mary carries is the mother of my “Lord.” The young teen experiences “butterflies” here, as the babe in her womb moves and responds not only to John’s leap of joy, but also to the voices of two women singing prayers and sharing a moment of gratitude for this time together, testifying to what God is doing in the world even now.

What follows is the Magnificat, or Mary’s song, based on Hannah’s song (1 Samuel 2:1-10), which she would have known from the Scriptures. Her spirit rejoices as she stands with Elizabeth; this is the moment when the frightened teen, put in the position of telling Joseph that she is going to have a baby, comes into her own and accepts the joys and the sorrows of being part of God’s plan. She has already said yes; here she embraces what that means. “He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.”

"My soul magnifies the Lord,  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.  
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;  
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name."

A Visitation, Brother Michael McGrath 2020  
Friendship and Grace; The Gift of Wise Friends

Hail Mary, full of grace, Bless are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb Jesus...

*Pastor Susan*

## Friendship and Grace; The Gift of Wise Friends

*As a Franciscan, I have always been curious about the fruitful friendship between Francis of Assisi and his female companion Clare. They were not lovers, yet they were deeply devoted to one another, built their orders together, and turned to one another for support and wisdom. My friend Mirabai Starr offers a vignette based on tales about Francis and Clare, and shows a mutual friendship built on their shared dedication to Christ:*

Clare gave up everything to be with Francis, to live as he lived, to see the face of the Divine in the faces of the poor and the oppressed and to love them as he loved them. “Her goal in life,” says Robert Ellsberg about Saint Clare, “was not to be a reflection of Francis but to be, like him, a reflection of Christ.” [1]

While Francis guided his growing order of Little Brothers, he assigned Clare as the leader of the Poor Ladies.

When Francis felt most alone in the world, most persecuted and misunderstood, it was Clare he would turn to for clarity, wisdom, and a love stripped of sentimentality. “All I want is to live as a hermit and love my Lord in secret,” he confessed to her. “And yet I am moved to preach the gospel of holy poverty in the world. What should I do?”

Clare did not equivocate: “God did not call you for yourself alone, but also for the salvation of others.” [2]

Toward the end of his life, when the brotherhood had burgeoned so quickly that it threatened to implode, Francis’s physical health mirrored the disease spreading through his community. Wracked by unrelenting pain in his joints and flesh, and nearly blind, the forty-four-year-old ascetic took refuge in a hermitage adjoining the convent of the Poor Clares at San Damiano [where Clare lived and died].

There, near to the woman who knew his soul and loved him with a perfect love, and enfolded in the sacred sounds and smells of the creation, Francis composed his ecstatic hymn, “The Canticle of The Sun.”

When Francis could no longer hide the gravity of his condition, the brothers took him home to die. Clare immediately became seriously ill, sharing the suffering of her beloved in her own body. When Francis heard that Clare was sick with grief, he sent her a message.

“I promise,” he wrote, “you will see me again before you die.” [*He accepted and enjoyed how much she loved him!* — Richard Rohr]

A few days later, the brothers carried Francis’s lifeless body to the cloistered convent of San Damiano and stopped beneath Clare’s window. They lifted him high so that Clare could almost reach out and touch his hair. The friars stood there for as long as Clare wished, while she filled her eyes with him and wailed.

Clare lived for another twenty-seven years without her “pillar of strength and consolation,” yet content in the arms of their common mother, “Our Lady, Most Holy Poverty.” She became a great and beloved spiritual leader, whose primary teaching was her life of radical simplicity and quiet joy.

**References:**[1] Robert Ellsberg, *All Saints: Daily Reflections on Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses for Our Time* (Crossroad: 2002, 1997), 345.

[2] *The Deeds of Blessed Francis and His Companions*, chapter 16. See *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, vol. 3: *The Prophet* (New City Press: 2001), 468–469. Mirabai Starr, *Saint Francis of Assisi: Brother of Creation* (Sounds True: 2013), 74–76. April 13, 2021

## Love and Friendship

*When you looked at me  
your eyes imprinted your grace in me;  
for this you loved me ardently;  
and thus my eyes deserved  
to adore what they beheld in you. . . .  
Let us go forth to behold ourselves in your beauty.*

—John of the Cross, “The Spiritual Canticle,” stanzas 32, 361542-1591 (1542–1591)  
Center for Action and Contemplation, Sunday, April 11, 2021