



THE ANNUNCIATION

Axel Theofilus Helsted (Danish, 1847–1907)

GOD'S WORD FOR THIS WEEK

Sunday 20th December 2020

The Fourth Sunday of Advent

The Collect of the Day

God our redeemer,
who prepared the blessed Virgin Mary
to be the mother of your Son:
Grant that, as she looked for his coming as our saviour,
so we may be ready to greet him
when he comes again as our judge;
who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

The Advent Collect

Almighty God,
Give us grace to cast away the works of darkness
and to put on the armour of light
now in the time of this mortal life
in which your Son Jesus Christ came to us in great humility;
that on the last day
when he shall come again in his glorious majesty
to judge the living and the dead,
we may rise to the life immortal;
through him who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

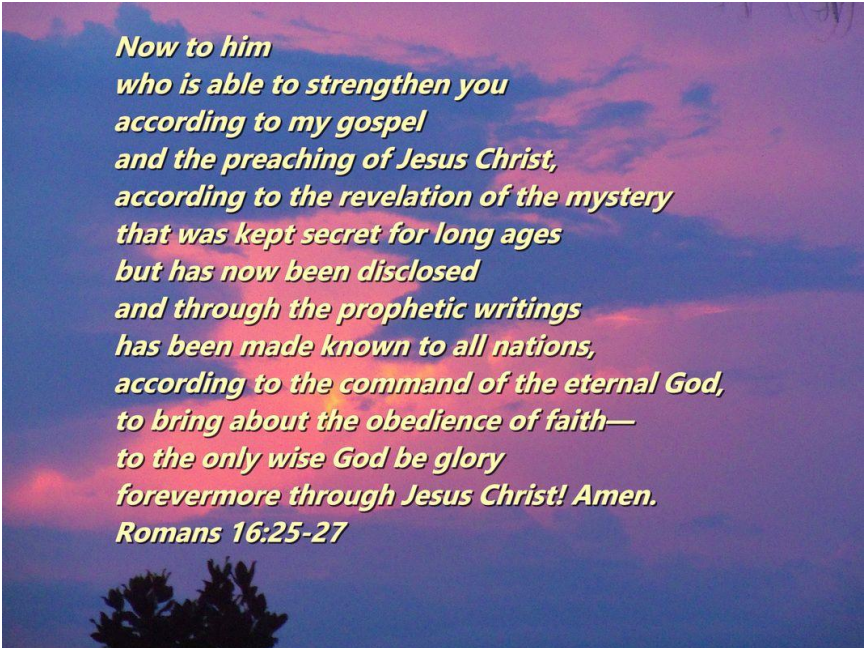
THE FIRST READING

2 Samuel 7: 1-11,

167Now when the king was settled in his house, and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him, ²the king said to the prophet Nathan, 'See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent.' ³Nathan said to the king, 'Go, do all that you have in mind; for the Lord is with you.'
⁴ But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan:
⁵Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the Lord:
Are you the one to build me a house to live in? ⁶I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle.
⁷Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders* of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, 'Why have you not built me a house of cedar?' ⁸Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the Lord of hosts:
I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel;⁹and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you;
and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth.
¹⁰And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, ¹¹from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. ¹⁶Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me;* your throne shall be established for ever.

God's will is to appoint a place for us with him; a place for us inside ourselves for him to reside
So that we may live from this place. Take time today to rediscover that place inside yourself in which
you can be with, sense and hear God.

THE EPISTLE



*Now to him
who is able to strengthen you
according to my gospel
and the preaching of Jesus Christ,
according to the revelation of the mystery
that was kept secret for long ages
but has now been disclosed
and through the prophetic writings
has been made known to all nations,
according to the command of the eternal God,
to bring about the obedience of faith—
to the only wise God be glory
forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.
Romans 16:25-27*



THE GOSPEL

Luke 1: 26-38

26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.' ²⁹*But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. ³¹And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him

Jesus. ³²He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' ³⁴Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?*' ³⁵The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born* will be holy; he will be called Son of God. ³⁶And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God.' ³⁸Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her.

Mary, this young girl gives us permission to be questioning and honest with God; to be afraid at what is sometimes asked of us and shows us that trusting God isn't always done with certainty and confidence. Perhaps that's what true trust is – a reliance on a higher power when the way ahead is unclear and uncertain.

If you look back, can you now see the times when you were uncertain but now see that God's hand was working through a particular situation?

Father, renew our trust in you.

'..I'll just leave you with this.
I don't care how many angels can
dance on the head of a pin. It's
enough to know that for some people
they exist, and that they dance.'

Poet Mary Oliver (1935 – 2019)

Gabriel's Annunciation

For a moment
I hesitated
on the threshold.
For the space
of a breath
I paused,
unwilling to disturb
her last ordinary moment,
knowing that the next step
would cleave her life:

that this day
would slice her story
in two,
dividing all the days before
from all the ones
to come.

The artists would later
depict the scene:
Mary dazzled
by the archangel,
her head bowed
in humble assent,
awed by the messenger
who condescended
to leave paradise
to bestow such an honor
upon a woman, and mortal.

Yet I tell you
it was I who was dazzled,
I who found myself agape
when I came upon her—
reading, at the loom, in the kitchen,
I cannot now recall;
only that the woman before me—
blessed and full of grace
long before I called her so—
shimmered with how completely
she inhabited herself,
inhabited the space around her,
inhabited the moment
that hung between us.



I wanted to save her
from what I had been sent
to say.

Yet when the time came,
when I had stammered
the invitation
(history would not record
the sweat on my brow,
the pounding of my heart;
would not note
that I said
Do not be afraid
to myself as much as
to her)
it was she
who saved me—
her first deliverance—
her *Let it be*
not just declaration

to the Divine
but a word of solace,
of soothing,
of benediction

for the angel
in the doorway
who would hesitate
one last time—
just for the space
of a breath
torn from his chest—
before wrenching himself away
from her radiant consent,
her beautiful and
awful yes.

Painting and Poem by—Jan Richardson