

## Advent 4, Year B: Luke 1.26-38

This month, many of us have savoured our ‘Seasons of Birth and Creativity Exhibition’, here at the cathedral, reflecting on this pregnancy, this ‘word made flesh’, that we hear announced today.



There is Rita’s angel announcing the pregnancy..in his simplicity and splendour

There is Pene Brook’s, ‘Annunciation’  
‘Which depicts the story of the conception of Jesus, and of the ultimate fruitfulness of Mary’s response to God, that birthed not just a child but a whole new way of knowing and being with God that is itself a process of birthing and re birthing’



There is Kate Campbell's .. 'early growth in the womb - new life nurtured and blooming' - gum blossoms in various stages of growth..



And Ann Miller's 'The eyes have it'. She writes: 'Most women feel great joy at the prospect of new life growing within them, but for some women this is tinged with feelings of loss of autonomy, and even of being invaded by an alien being. The grief associated with unwanted pregnancy, a lost pregnancy or unfulfilled longing for a child can be deeply felt, often not publicly expressed. The bizarre and somewhat unsettling placement of different eyes on the same face reflects the (often) unconscious inner conflict.'



All these, and many more works in the exhibition, are rich reflections for this journey on which Mary is about to embark.

We are almost there! It is almost Christmas! But wait, a little bit longer.. This morning we hear from Luke's gospel, of this annunciation, of the intersection of human and divine life.. an opening between heaven and earth.. a messenger, a young woman, a conception, no, two.. Mary and Elizabeth. In the earthiness of Palestine, lives are changing.

The messenger announces a conception impossible to imagine. Mary says, 'you've got to be joking!' She is reassured, 'don't be afraid'. It is up to her to say 'yes', which surprisingly, in the circumstances, she does.. I think I'd need a little more time, I'd balk, go and hide, pray, reflect,.. this is a big thing.. this birthing God! But say YES she did..

'Let me become what you have called me to be,' she says, 'Let it be..'

Knowing from the angel that God was already working in her cousin Elizabeth..

What if she'd said NO? Probably then there would be no Christmas story.

But, 'nothing is impossible with God.'

'Let me become what you have called me to be,' she said.

God is offering to take the space with us in our human flesh, to share our material life and draw us into something very different.. barely understood. This is a journey of faith - we never really know - Mary's response is the epitome of what faith is, she is drawn into a mystery, into the unknown, and becomes a model of faith... because of her 'Yes', God and humanity will never be the same again..

Can we say YES, too?

Jan Richardson writes:

*'When Mary says let it be to the archangel, it is an act of radical surrender. She offers her yes not with the meek passivity that history has so often ascribed to her; this kind of surrender is born not of weakness but of a daring strength within her and a stunning grace that shows up to sustain her. Mary's surrender is deliberate, the choice of a woman ready to give herself to the sacred with such abandon that she agrees, with intention, to give up every last plan she had for her life.*

*Mary's audacious yes propels her onto a dark way. She sets out on a path almost completely devoid of signposts or trails left by others; she chooses a road utterly unlike any she had ever imagined for herself. What must it have been like to walk a way she could hardly perceive, while carrying within herself—in her heart and womb and bones—a light unlike any the world had ever seen?*

*What must it have been like for the archangel who witnessed Mary's yes?*

### **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*.  
—Jan Richardson<sup>1</sup>

That is an angelic perspective. I end with a poem from Mary's perspective  
by Kathy Galloway:

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<sup>1</sup> <http://adventdoor.com/2014/12/19/advent-4-gabriel-and-mary/>

It was like music:  
Hovering and floating there  
With the sound of lutes and timbrels  
In the night air

It was like waves,  
Beating upon the shore:  
Insistent with a rhythm, a pulsing  
Unfelt before

It was like wind:  
Blowing from off the seas  
Of other, far other  
Lands than these.

It was like wings,  
Like whirring wings that fly-  
The song of an army of swans  
On the dark sky.

It was like God:  
A presence of blinding light,  
Ravishing body and soul  
In the Spring light<sup>2</sup>

*Let us pray*

God of our lives, you are always calling us to follow you into the future, inviting us to new ventures, new challenges, new ways to care, new images to touch the hearts of all. You are inviting us to say, 'yes' to you.

When we are fearful of the unknown, give us courage.

When we worry that we are not up to the task, remind us that you would not call us if you did not believe in us.

When we get tired, or feel disappointed with the way things are going, remind us that you can bring change and hope out of the most difficult situations. Amen<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Mary's Song from *The Witnesses* (1956)  
Clive Sansom, Methuen, UK

<sup>3</sup> Kathy Galloway <http://www.ottawacspa.ca/cspa/images/prayers/New%20Ways.pdf>

Susanna