

ST BOTOLPH
C A M B R I D G E

**ADVENT CAROL SERVICE
WITH
HOLY COMMUNION**



Fra Angelico *Annunciation* (1433–1434)
Tempera on wood; Museo Diocesano, Cortona, Tuscany

ADVENT II

SUNDAY 6TH DECEMBER AT 11.00AM

Welcome to our Advent Carol Service. It is set out as a linked narrative of words and music to tell the story of Creation, Disobedience, the promise of Redemption, the foreshadowing of the Incarnation, the need to make ready our own hearts as we end with the final words of scripture – Come, Lord Jesus.

ORGAN MUSIC

JS Bach *Chorale Prelude on 'Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme'*

¶ *Please stand*

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION – Fr Stephen

¶ *Please sit*

INTROIT

Michael Praetorius *Nun komm der Heiden Heiland*

Now come, Saviour of the gentiles, recognised as the Virgin's child;
so that all the world marvels, God ordained such a birth for Him.

THE FIRST READING – CREATION

Genesis I, vv. 1 – 5

Read by Ginnie Norman

IN the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

Thanks be to God.

HYMN

- | | |
|---|---|
| C REATOR of the stars of night,
Thy people's everlasting light,
O Jesu, Saviour of us all,
Regard thy servants when they call. | 4 At thy great name, exalted now,
All knees must bend, all hearts must bow,
All things in heaven and earth shall own,
That thou art Lord and King alone. |
| 2 Thou, grieving at the bitter cry
Of all creation doomed to die,
Didst come to save a ruined race
With healing gifts of heavenly grace. | 5 To thee, O holy One, we pray,
Our judge in that tremendous day,
Preserve us, while we dwell below,
From every onslaught of the foe. |
| 3 Thou camest, Bridegroom of the bride,
As drew the world to evening-tide,
Proceeding from a virgin shrine,
The Son of Man, yet Lord divine. | 6 All praise, eternal Son, to thee,
Whose advent sets thy people free,
Whom with the Father we adore,
And Spirit blest, for evermore. Amen. |

THE BIDDING PRAYER

BELOVED in Christ, as we prepare this Advent to celebrate the birth of the Christ Child, let us hear again in the words of the Scriptures the story of God's loving purpose in our creation and redemption. Let us bring to mind the goodness of God in calling the creation into his light; his mercy in Christ Jesus in drawing us from the darkness of sin; and his grace to us and to all sinners in summoning us by his Holy Spirit, as the dawn of his kingdom breaks upon us. But first let us pray for ourselves and all people, acknowledging before God our sins and the sins of the world, bringing before him our needs and the needs of those for whom our Lord Jesus Christ had a special care, when in great humility he came to live amongst us: the poor, the bereaved, the sick, and the outcast. And so, as we look for the dawning of the light of God's rule on earth, let us commend ourselves and the world to the love of our Saviour Jesus Christ and to the power of his redeeming Spirit, in the words he himself taught us to say:

OUR Father
which art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

THE SECOND READING – THE FALL

Genesis III

Read by Niamh Mulcahy

NOW the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden. And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat? And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. And the LORD God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat. And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel. Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it

wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return. And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living. Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them. And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.

Thanks be to God.

¶ *Please stand*

HYMN

COME, thou long expected Jesus,
Born to set thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us,
Let us find our rest in thee.

2 Israel's strength and consolation,
Hope of all the earth thou art;
Dear desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart.

3. Born thy people to deliver,
Born a child and yet a King,
Born to reign in us forever,
Now thy gracious kingdom bring.

4. By thine own eternal spirit,
Rule in all our hearts alone;
By thine all sufficient merit
Raise us to thy glorious throne.

¶ *Please sit*

THE THIRD READING – OUR ADVENT HOPE

Isaiah XL, vv. 1 – 11

Read by George Owers

COMFORT ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD's hand double for all her sins. The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it. The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field: The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever. O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God! Behold, the Lord GOD will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.

Thanks be to God.

CAROL

Boris Ord *Adam lay ybounden*

THE FOURTH READING
THE ANNUNCIATION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Luke I, vv. 26 – 38

Read by Nell Burnham

AND in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible. And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.

Thanks be to God.

CAROL

Edgar Pettman *Gabriel's Message*

THE FIFTH READING – THE VISITATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY



Luca della Robbia *The Visitation* c. 1445

Luke I, vv. 39 – 49

Read by Sarah Boyer

AND Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda; And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth. And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord. And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name.

Thanks be to God.

CAROL

Patrick Hadley *I sing of a Maiden*

¶ *Please stand*

HYMN

- T**ELL out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!
Unnumbered blessings give my spirit voice;
Tender to me the promise of his Word;
In God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.
- 2 Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his name:
Make known his might, the deeds his arm has
done;
His mercy sure, from age to age the same;
His holy name, the Lord, the Mighty One.
- 3 Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his might!
Powers and dominions lay their glory by.
Proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight,
The hungry fed, the humble lifted high.
- 4 Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word:
Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure.
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord
To children's children and forevermore.

¶ *Please sit*

THE SIXTH READING – ST JOHN THE BAPTIST

Matthew III, vv. 1 – 12

Read by Dan Jones

IN those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey. Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

Thanks be to God.

HYMN

- H**ARK! A herald voice is calling:
'Christ is nigh,' it seems to say;
'Cast away the dreams of darkness,
O ye children of the day!'
- 2 Startled at the solemn warning,
Let the earth-bound soul arise;
Christ, her Sun, all sloth dispelling,
Shines upon the morning skies.
- 3 Lo! the Lamb, so long expected,
Comes with pardon down from heaven;
Let us haste, with tears of sorrow,
One and all to be forgiven;
- 4 So when next he comes in glory,
And earth's final hour draws near,
May he then as our defender
On the clouds of heaven appear.

5 Honour, glory, virtue, merit,
To the Father and the Son,
With the co-eternal Spirit,
While unending ages run. Amen.

THE SEVENTH READING – THE FOOLISH VIRGINS

Matthew XXV, vv. 1 – 13

Read by Shona Johnstone

THEN shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.

Thanks be to God.

HYMN

BEHOLD the Bridegroom cometh in the middle of the night,
And blest is he whose loins are girt, whose lamp is burning bright;
But woe to that dull servant, whom the Master shall surprise
With lamp untrimmed, unburning, and with slumber in his eyes.

Do thou, my soul, beware, beware lest thou in sleep sink down,
Lest thou be given o'er to death, and lose the golden crown;
But see that thou be sober, with a watchful eye, and thus
Cry, "Holy, holy, holy God, have mercy upon us!"

That day, the day of fear, shall come; my soul, slack not thy toil,
But light thy lamp, and feed it well, and make it bright with oil;
Thou knowest not how soon may sound the cry at eventide,
"Behold, the Bridegroom comes! Arise! He comes to meet the Bride!"

Beware, my soul! take thou good heed, lest thou in slumber lie,
And, like the five, remain without, and knock, and vainly cry;
But watch, and bear thy lamp undimmed, and Christ shall gird thee on
His own bright wedding robe of light – the glory of the Son.

¶ *Please kneel or sit*

ADVENT COLLECTS

Let us pray.

STIR up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people; that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may of thee be plenteously rewarded; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

MAKE us, we beseech thee, O Lord, our God, watchful and heedful in awaiting the coming of thy Son, Christ our Lord; that when he shall come and knock, he may find us not sleeping in our sins, but awake, and rejoicing in his praises.

Amen.

ALMIGHTY God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal, through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and for ever.

Amen.

¶ *Please stand*

THE OFFERTORY

HYMN

O COME, O come, Emmanuel!
Redeem thy captive Israel,
That into exile drear is gone,
Far from the face of God's dear Son.
*Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

2 O come, thou Branch of Jesse! draw
The quarry from the lion's claw;
From the dread caverns of the grave,
From nether hell, thy people save.
*Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

3 O come, O come, thou Dayspring bright!
Pour on our souls thy healing light;
Dispel the long night's ling'ring gloom,
And pierce the shadows of the tomb.
*Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

4 O Come, thou Lord of David's Key!
The royal door fling wide and free;
Safeguard for us the heav'nward road,
And bar the way to death's abode.
*Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

5 O come, O come, Adonai,
Who in thy glorious majesty
From that high mountain clothed with awe
Gavest thy folk the elder law.
*Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

¶ *Please kneel or sit*

THE CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

YE that do truly and earnestly repent you of your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbours, and intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God, and walking from henceforth in his holy ways; Draw near with faith, and take this holy Sacrament to your comfort; and make your humble confession to Almighty God, meekly kneeling upon your knees.

ALMIGHTY God,
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Maker of all things, Judge of all men; We acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness, Which we, from time to time, most grievously have committed, By thought, word, and deed, Against thy Divine Majesty, Provoking most justly thy wrath and indignation against us. We do earnestly repent, And are heartily sorry for these our misdoings; The remembrance of them is grievous unto us; The burden of them is intolerable. Have mercy upon us, Have mercy upon us, most merciful Father; For thy Son our Lord Jesus Christ's sake, Forgive us all that is past; And grant that we may ever hereafter Serve and please thee In newness of life, To the honour and glory of thy Name; Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE ABSOLUTION

ALMIGHTY God, our heavenly Father, who of his great mercy hath promised forgiveness of sins to all them that with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto him; Have mercy upon you; + pardon and deliver you from all your sins; confirm and strengthen you in all goodness; and bring you to life everlasting; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

THE SURSUM CORDA

THE Lord be with you.
And with thy spirit.
Lift up your hearts.
We lift them up unto the Lord.
Let us give thanks unto our Lord God.
It is meet and right so to do.
It is very meet, right, and our bounden duty, that we should at all times, and in all places, give thanks unto thee, O Lord, Holy Father, Almighty, Everlasting God. Therefore with Angels and Archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify thy glorious Name; evermore praising thee, and singing:

THE SANCTUS & BENEDICTUS

(sung to the setting by Charles Wood in the Phrygian mode)

HOLY, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts, heaven and earth are full of thy glory: Glory be to thee, O Lord most High. Amen. + Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

THE PRAYER OF CONSECRATION

ALmighty God, our heavenly Father, who of thy tender mercy, didst give thine only Son Jesus Christ to suffer death upon the Cross for our redemption; who made there (by his one oblation of himself once offered) a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world; and did institute, and in his holy Gospel command us to continue, a perpetual memory of that his precious death, until his coming again: Hear us, O merciful Father, we most humbly beseech thee; and grant that by the power of the Holy Spirit, we receiving these thy creatures of bread and wine, according to thy Son our Saviour Jesus Christ's holy institution, in remembrance of his death and passion, may be partakers of his most blessed + Body and Blood: Who, in the same night that he was betrayed, took Bread; and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: *Take, eat, this is my Body, which is given for you; Do this in remembrance of me.* Likewise, after supper, he took the Cup; and, when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying: *Drink ye all of this; for this is my Blood of the New Testament, which is shed for you, and for many, for the remission of sins; Do this, as oft as ye shall drink it, in remembrance of me.*
Amen.

THE AGNUS DEI

(sung to the setting by Charles Wood in the Phrygian mode)

OLAMB of God, that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us. O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us. O Lamb of God that takest away the sins of the world, grant us thy peace.

THE INVITATION TO COMMUNION

THE Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for thee, preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life: Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for thee, and feed on him in thy heart by faith with thanksgiving.
Amen.

COMMUNION ANTHEM

Charles Wood *O thou the central orb*

THE PRAYER OF OBLATION

OLORD and heavenly Father, we thy humble servants entirely desire thy fatherly goodness mercifully to accept this our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving; most humbly beseeching thee to grant, that by the merits and death of thy Son Jesus Christ, and through faith in his blood, we and all thy whole Church may obtain remission of our sins, and all other benefits of his passion. And here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto thee; humbly beseeching thee, that all we, who are partakers of this Holy Communion, may be fulfilled with thy grace and heavenly benediction. And although we be unworthy, through our manifold sins, to offer unto thee any sacrifice, yet we beseech thee to accept this our bounden duty and service; not weighing our merits, but pardoning our offences, through Jesus Christ our Lord; by whom, and with whom, in the unity of the Holy Ghost, all honour and glory be unto thee, O Father Almighty, world without end.
Amen.

THE BLESSING

THE peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord: And the blessing of God Almighty, + the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, be amongst you and remain with you always.

¶ *Please stand*

THE LAST GOSPEL

St John I: 1 – 13

read by the Revd Vivienne Lake

IN the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him, and without Him was made nothing that was made: in Him was life, and the life was the Light of men; and the Light shineth in darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to give testimony of the Light, that all men might believe through him. He was not the Light, but was to give testimony of the Light. That was the true Light, which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world. He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, He gave them power to be made the sons of God, to them that believe in His Name, who are born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

RECESSIONAL HYMN

- | | |
|---|---|
| L O! he comes with clouds descending,
Once for favoured sinners slain;
Thousand thousand saints attending
Swell the triumph of his train:
Alleluia!
God appears, on earth to reign. | 3 Those dear tokens of his passion
Still his dazzling body bears,
Cause of endless exultation
To his ransomed worshippers:
With what rapture
Gaze we on those glorious scars! |
| 2 Ev'ry eye shall now behold him,
Robed in dreadful majesty;
Those who set at naught and sold him,
Pierced and nailed him to the tree,
Deeply wailing
Shall the true Messiah see. | 4 Yea, Amen! let all adore thee,
High on thine eternal throne;
Saviour, take the power and glory:
Claim the kingdom for thine own:
O come quickly!
Alleluia! Come, Lord, Come! |



Gustav Doré *Lo! he comes with clouds descending*

ORGAN VOLUNTARY

JS Bach Chorale Prelude on 'Herr Christ, der ein'ge Gottes-Sohn'



The archangel Gabriel appears to Mary in a loggia of columns and arches. He occupies the larger part of the painting with his richly painted wings extending out through the colonnade. The upper tips of his wings mark the centre of the painting. He speaks out to the Virgin, 'Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women...The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God'.¹ A dove flutters above her head in a burst of golden light and the space extends into the Virgin's chamber. The bed curtain serves to set off Gabriel's halo. Outside the loggia is a delicately painted garden, enclosed by a palisade symbolic of Mary's virginity. Carved in a roundel above the centre column is a half-length effigy of Isaiah, who had prophesied the birth of a child to a virgin. In the top left corner of the loggia's pink entablature Adam and Eve are expelled from Paradise, the second reference to the Old Testament. Three lines of text are painted between the Archangel on the left and the Virgin on the right. The words of the angel are written on two lines, reading from left to right. The words of Mary are between those two lines. Her words are written upside-down and her reply is written backwards. This indicates to the viewer that the words were addressed to God, who would be in the proper position to read them.²



The scene shows Mary greeting her elderly cousin Elizabeth. It includes two other figures – unborn and therefore unseen – the Messiah Jesus and His messenger, John the Baptist. St Luke's Gospel proclaims that this is no ordinary greeting: And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.³ The contrast with which della Robbia portrays the two figures accentuates the improbability of events. Mary is even younger than usual and Elizabeth even older. Elizabeth does not bow before her young cousin but actually kneels, as Mary prepares to sing her famous Magnificat. The greatest mystery is what is invisible - the new life in each of their wombs. Robbia invites us, as Advent begins, to recall the love-filled awe which drove Elizabeth to her knees, when in an unexpected moment God brought hope into a fallen world.

© June Woolhouse

1 Luke 1: 28-35 KJV

2 Lasse Hodne, 'Reading and Viewing Words in Fra Angelico's Typological Paintings', *Acta ad archaeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia* 24 (2011) nr. 10, p. 260.

3 Luke 1:39-4 KJV.