



LOVE COMES RUNNING

I remember
the first time I was afraid.
I was a child.
It was a nightmare.
*(You remember those pesky
monsters under the bed.)*
I remember
minutes felt like hours.
I begged
the sun to rise.
*(Fear always begs
the sun to rise.)*

Eventually,
after minutes that felt
like hours,
I cried out.
My dad came running.
He sat at the edge of my bed.
He said there is no reason
to be afraid.
He checked the closet and
the floorboards.
He rearranged my pillows.
He said, *"I can stay."*

And that's when I learned
that when you are afraid,
love always comes running.
Love says, *"I can stay."*

That's what God does for us.
God sits at the edge of
the bed.
God checks the closet
and the floorboards.
God says, *"Be not afraid."*
God stays until sunrise.
Love always comes
running.

*Poem by
Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed*

God meets us in our fear

READ Luke 1:26-38

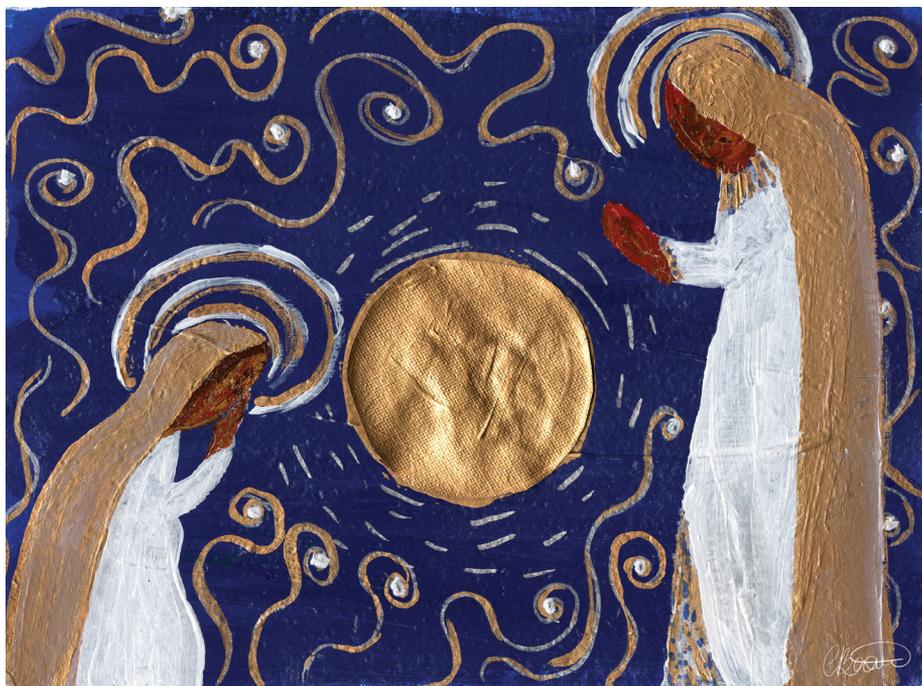
COMMENTARY | Dr. Christine J. Hong

The story of the annunciation has always held dissonance for me. After all, the angel's exclamation that Mary should not be afraid is terribly unrealistic. How could Mary not have felt fear when confronted with a celestial being? How could she avoid feeling afraid after hearing the angel's message about her pregnancy? Later, Mary's son, Jesus, also felt fear at Gethsemane when faced with betrayal and capital punishment. As she watched him suffer and die, the fear and anguish she must have felt!

As a young child, I remember whenever my brother or I were very ill I would hear my mother praying in Korean, "*Jeh-gah dae-shin*" ("Take me instead"). My mother bargained with God to ease her children's pain. In my time as a chaplain and pastor to parents with sick children, sometimes with life-threatening illnesses, I have heard many parents whisper the same prayer, "Take me instead."

What if the dissonance is what we are meant to sit with? Every day, people are faced with untold grief and pain, and the gospel, or the good news, is not enough to take that pain and fear away. Hope sounds hollow to those who are enduring the wretched parts of life. Rather than gloss over the dissonance, can we sit with Mary? Yes, the Magnificat, her song of courage, is a mark of her bravery. Still, we know—because we too are human—that courage rises despite our fear, not in its absence. Those who have suffered loss know this.

Perhaps this story and the dissonance of the angel's command are an invitation to sit with those who are experiencing the dissonance of a world moving on despite their personal struggle—a world that says, "Cheer up! Move on!" while they are still grieving. Perhaps the dissonance invites us to accompany people moving through their pain, as Mary and Jesus accompanied one another through life events only the two of them understood. Despite the dissonance, they moved through the liminal and tender space of their lives together. In other words, God moved through the liminal and tender spaces of God's human life with Mary, even as they were both afraid.



Mary's Golden Annunciation | Carmelle Beaugelin
Acrylic, gilding paint, canvas collage on handmade reclaimed paper

God meets us in our fear

READ Luke 1:26-38

FROM THE ARTIST | Carmelle Beaugelin

Mary's Golden Annunciation explores the moment of encounter between Mary and the angelic messenger. This unusual encounter may have been startling to young Mary—a soon-to-be teen bride turned, possibly, unwed mother. Yet, with holy bravery in the face of communal isolation, she accepts the call to be a surrogate mother to a son who is to be the savior of her people and the son of God.

There is not much commentary regarding Mary's consent to motherhood. She is often portrayed as a humble, yet passive, "accepter" of a fate predestined for her. But I wonder, what if the angel had appeared to Mary and she had declined? Would her name be erased from historic and religious memory in favor of another willing young virgin?

Mary's Golden Annunciation depicts not only a remarkable encounter, but also the moment that divinity in human form was conceived. It is my speculation that the divinity of God entered Mary's body no sooner than Mary's "yes" went out from her mouth. In a time when women had few options other than marriage, Mary's consent to a potentially unwed motherhood is a brave act of subversive agency. In Mary's "yes," uttered in her Magnificat, we see the transformation of a young teenage girl from fearful to determined, from simply accepting to deciding, from passivity to agency, from betrothed to surrogate mother of God—an honor rarer than gold. Perhaps the most remarkable annunciation in this passage is not the messenger's revelation to Mary, but Mary's "yes" to the call.

PRAY

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.



Wednesday | Journal Prompt

FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION...

God meets us in our fear

When the angel Gabriel comes to Mary, she is perplexed and confused—and no doubt, afraid. And yet, the angel’s news is: “Do not be afraid.” In the space below, reflect on a time when you were afraid, but said yes to an invitation anyway.



Ancestral | Hannah Garrity
Paper lace with watercolor

God meets us in our fear

READ Isaiah 11:1-10

FROM THE ARTIST | Hannah Garrity

This illustration explores the idea that perhaps the oppressor is not so far away. The lion and the calf, the cheetah and the goat, the wolf and the lamb, the ox and the bear—each predator shares a face with its prey. Each pair of animal faces is connected to the root line of the stump of Jesse. Each generation has been challenged to forward the radical call for peace in this Isaiah text.

As I read this text, I was drawn most closely to the idea of the roots, the past history, the ancient texts from the ancient times expressing the human condition and its possibilities. The practice of culturally responsive teaching comes to mind for me, a public school teacher in Virginia.

Culturally responsive teaching is a humanizing approach that allows for the boundaries of culture to meld, firmly giving way to incredible curricular access for all students, regardless of their backgrounds. As I walk in each day as the face of oppression, the world arrives, too. My school has 48 languages spoken. We have many recent immigrants. I have a new student added to one of my classes once every couple of weeks. The only way to connect across barriers is to remove barriers with honor and reverence for the collective wisdom of humanity.

My white skin represents the oppression of centuries. With a culturally responsive approach, I can lead with love. I can honor each student's ancestry, lived experience, and daily presence in my classroom.

Perhaps the asp and the adder not injuring the child and the infant are a metaphor for this. In this image, the child and the infant are represented by the roots. The viper represents the asp and the adder. The threat looms, yet the roots thrive and the sprout emerges from the stump. The prey and the predator are on equal terms; no longer is one superior to another. We must humanize one another. We must honor each other's ancestry.

PRAY

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.



Scan to hear the tune!

Here I Am

Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence

Text: Anna Strickland (2022)

Music: Traditional French carol (17th cent.)



An - gel Ga - briel came to Ma - ry
Though his words were filled with glo - ry
Week by week in Ma - ry's bel - ly
Whe - ther we may feel we're rea - dy



In the hills of Ga - li - lee Ap - pre - hen - sion
Still the mes - sage brought great fear "Who am I to
God was grow - ing flesh and bone As her life and
For the task be - fore us laid God will streng - then



and con - fu - sion Filled her, won - d'ring what's to
bear the sav - ior With the path - way so un -
path were chang - ing Ne - ver was she left a -
and up - hold us Ev - en when the fear won't



be clear?" "Do not be a - fraid," the an - gel told the
lone "Here I am," she pledged; the an - gel Gab - riel
fade With her all the while was Ma - ry's ho - ly
We say, "Here I am," to God's tran - scen - dent



maid "God has high - ly fa - vored thee"
fled Quick - ly as he had ap - peared
child Pledge of "Here I am" of God's own
plan Trust - ing God to lend us aid

Saturday | *God meets us in our fear*

FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION...

SABBATH IN THE KITCHEN

As a Sabbath activity, follow this family recipe or prepare another favorite dish.

DECORATED CHRISTMAS COOKIES

A family recipe shared by Lisle Gwynn Garrity

As a child, Christmastime always promised us a tradition that was an otherwise forbidden activity: the chance to play with our food. My grandmother's kitchen table became an art studio splattered with flour and sprinkles when, each year, she retrieved the metal tin filled with Christmas-themed cookie cutters, and we spent the afternoon crafting edible Christmas treats. To my knowledge, we never made these cookies from scratch because my grandmother was admittedly not much of a cook, and because pre-made convenience allowed us to devote ourselves to the art of cookie sprinkles. We would spend hours rolling the dough, clapping our hands into flour clouds, and discovering how many red and green sugar crystals could fit on reindeer-shaped patties. And so, for this Sabbath Saturday recipe, I give you permission to focus less on baking and more on playing. I hope you'll buy pre-made sugar cookie dough, get your kitchen messy, and decorate Christmas cookies with little humans leading the way.

INGREDIENTS

- Store-bought, pre-made sugar cookie dough (*or bake from scratch if the word "pre-made" makes you wince*)
- Sprinkles—as many kinds and colors as possible
- Store-bought icing

INSTRUCTIONS

With a rolling pin, flatten the cookie dough in between handfuls of flour. Use cookie cutters to cut the dough into fun shapes—or use a knife to freehand Christmas-themed creations. Sprinkle abundantly. Bake until your kitchen swells with sweetness.