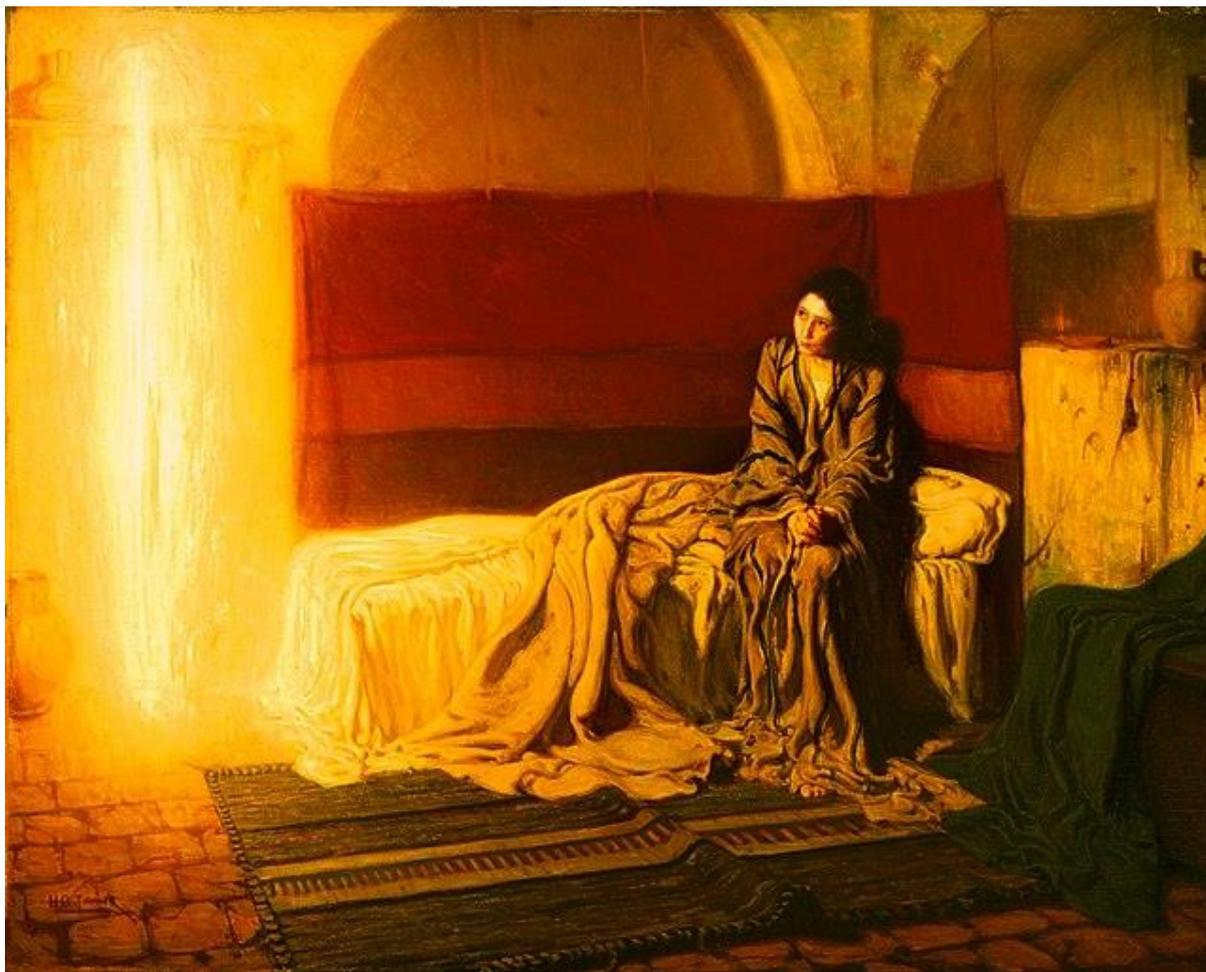


Advent 4 – Reflection



The Annunciation by Henry Ossawa Tanner 1898

Mary is a central figure in the mystery of the incarnation and birth of Jesus; she carries inside her the child that we are waiting for throughout this Advent season. Hers is the final candle in the outer ring of the Advent wreath. To honour Mary this week I have chosen this image of the Annunciation to remind us that God's preparations for the birth of Jesus started long ago; before the beginning of the world according to John's gospel. (*John 1*)

There are many works of art depicting the visit of the angel to Mary (*Luke 1.26-38*), but I think that this one is unusual and striking. Mary is shown as a young woman, barefoot and wearing a nightgown. It looks as if her sleeping area is just a section of the main living room, separated by a screen. The angel is represented as a column of light rather than the usual semi-human figure. The presence of God is often shown in artwork as a beam of light and Jesus is referred to as the Light of the World, so this is a clear indication of God's message to Mary. Mary looks thoughtful and anxious rather than terrified even though this is a far from normal occurrence. Mary is looking directly into the angel light, accepting the role that God has assigned her with quiet self-assurance.

Behind the angelic light is the outline of a shelf which creates the form of a cross. This reminds us of the suffering and death of Jesus, and that Mary will also suffer deep sadness and anguish. (*John 19.25b-27*) She will need all her courage and faith in God to accomplish the task that lies ahead of

her. This makes her “Yes” even more impressive. (*Luke 1.38*) She knows and understands God well enough to trust in what he asks of her, so Mary becomes the cornerstone of God’s plan for salvation. God’s choice of Mary indicates recognition of her great strength of character. In Christmas carols Mary is often referred to as “meek and mild” but perhaps words such as “courageous” and “strong-minded” may be better descriptors. I am sure there were times when Mary questioned the destiny set out for her, when she wished for an ordinary existence, but her trust in God led her to accept the role assigned to her.

This reminds us that God knows each one of us intimately, as he knew Mary – and we each have a part to play in God’s plan. There will almost certainly be challenges; our lives will not always be smooth and care-free but God does not ask us to take on more than we are capable of. Mary teaches us about trust in God and confidence in the knowledge of God’s love for each one of us.

Consider: What is God asking you to do? What is your part in God’s plan?

Prayer

Lord, you have known us from our mother’s womb: as we seek you in the face of Jesus Christ, give us your Holy Spirit to lead us daily more deeply into the joy that comes from the knowledge of your eternal love. Amen