

Daily Meditation 03-24-25

Good News in Dark Times: The Feast of the Annunciation

Good morning.

This morning, we are celebrating in anticipation the Feast of the Annunciation, which is on Tuesday this week. So today, Monday is the eve of the Annunciation.

And I've been thinking and praying about this lately. Partly, I think, because I'm doing a four-week course on the subject of *Darkness Of Our Times*. Each week, we've had a new person in dialogue with me. First week being Mirabai Starr, and then Andrew Harvey, and Bishop Yvette Flunder, and then tomorrow, Father Adam Bucko.

And we need to recognize how dark our times are. And we call on the mystics, because they are people who go to the edge. And they have language by which to name evil and darkness and despair: language like the dark night, the dark night of our soul, the dark night of society, and what I call the dark night of our species, that we are all going through.

But the Via Creativa, the artists, are great teachers of hope. Miles Davis, the painting behind me, he recorded a whole album on the Blues. And poets have done the same: writing about the darkness that we struggle through.

And this is where I think the story of the Annunciation is so powerful in our time, so fitting. And I'm not the only one, so many artists in the centuries have chosen this as a primary statement among their many paintings, this being the Annunciation. Because I think the Annunciation is truly a tremendous song of hope in a time of darkness, the first century under the imperial rule of Rome. It was not a pleasant time to be enduring.

And of course, the story that begins with the Annunciation ends with the Crucifixion, and that certainly was not a pleasant happening. But then it does not end with the Crucifixion. It goes on to talk about Resurrection, Ascension, Pentecost, the coming of the Spirit to awaken all peoples, to our capacity for goodness and beauty and justice and compassion. So a whole story that in many ways begins with Annunciation, goes through the dying process of the Via Negativa of the dark night, but refuses to end there.

So I'd like to share with you the fuller story that I did not put into the daily meditation, but it reads like this in Luke's Gospel Chapter One, beginning at Verse 26:

In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph of the House of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. He went in and said to her, Rejoice so highly favored, the Lord is with you. She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean. But the angel said to her, Mary, do not be afraid. You have won God's favor.

So fear is right at the center of things here, the center of the story, as it is so often. even today.

Listen: You are to conceive and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. He will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and his reign will have no end. Mary said to the angel, but how can this come about, since I am a virgin? The Holy Spirit will come upon you. the angel answered, and the power over the Most High will cover you with His shadow, and so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God.

Now, in the Jewish tradition, Israel is called Son of God at times, and people who are wise are called Son of God.

Know this too: Your kinswoman, Elizabeth, has in her old age, herself conceived a son. (And of course, Abraham and Sarah conceived a son in a very old age.) And she whom people called barren, is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God, I am the handmaid of the Lord, said Mary. Let what you have said, be done to me. And the angel left her.

So this is a story that has ignited in many artists over the years, some of their very best work. And I ask, Why? Why is the story accompanied over the last 2000 years by so many very great paintings? I think it's because of one word, Hope.

Humanity is always looking for Hope. Humanity is always needing Hope, because there is a lot of fear, there is a lot of despair, especially at certain times like in history, like our current one on the planet. First of all, we have the crisis of the planet itself. We are facing our own extinction. Let me say that again, we are facing our own extinction. And millions of other species have already gone extinct, and millions more are facing their own extinction. We're in this together, this suffering of Mother Earth, this matricide, the killing of the mother that is everywhere, and absolutely out front and prominent in America today, with a president and a MAGA movement that wants to shut down the EPA, and literally sold its soul for billions of dollars to fossil-fuel CEOs.

So denial is the realm, the currency of the realm today. And that's just what's going on with Mother Earth. Then what's going on human society, in economics and politics, and the wiping away of acknowledgement of racism, as if it's not still part of our culture, the erasing of heroes (Jackie Robinson they tried to erase the other day), and now I just read this morning, they are erasing a Native American

soldier who was part of the famous picture of the raising of the flag in Iwo Jima. And saying that DEI is some kind of mistaken ideology, as if diversity is not a blessing. Diversity IS a blessing.

So in all this darkness, we need stories of hope, and that's what the Feast of the Annunciation is. And in tomorrow's daily meditation, I will share a new painting, just literally off the canvas, a new painting of the Annunciation that's just been born.

Thank you. We'll see you next week.