

SUNDAY PLUS

You are blessed!

A Year of the Word



Archangel Gabriel and The Virgin Annunciate, painting by Gerard David (c.1455–1523), painted in 1510, oil on oak panel. © Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Willing and joyful

by Patrick van der Vorst

Mary couldn't have possibly understood everything that was going on when the angel appeared to her, but just willingly and joyfully participated in the mystery. This reading is all about invitation and response: God's call and our free will to decide whether to follow that call or not. In

our painting we see Mary's serene and joyful acceptance of her calling.

Gerard David, based in Bruges, painted these two stunning Annunciation panels, which originally formed the movable wings of an altarpiece. The panels are executed in grisaille effect. This is a technique by which a painting is executed entirely in shades of grey to create the illusion of sculpture. Yet the flesh tones and hair of the figures depart from the monochromatic grey, in keeping with the softer, naturalistic vein prevalent in Bruges painting at the turn of the fifteenth century. The dove depicted above Our Lady, symbolic, of course, for the Holy Spirit, is flying towards her and will watch over her.

The angel Gabriel appeared to Mary in the small town of Nazareth, which was in stark contrast to the big city of Jerusalem. God could have easily chosen someone in Jerusalem, centre of the Jewish world, to draw attention to the fact he was sending his Son into the world. But God chose the small town of Nazareth. Jesus would be able to grow up there, discreetly, under the radar, learn from his father in his carpenter's workshop... until he would start his ministry at about the age of 30...

Patrick van der Vorst left behind his career in art and antiques in order to study for the priesthood at the Beda College in Rome.

Alone but not lonely

by Lucy Russell

Edgar was born in September. He was due on the autumn equinox. As the nights drew longer, I found myself getting up to feed Edgar while the rest of the family was sleeping. I remember rocking him in my arms, looking out on the silent street. There is a lamp post outside our house, but a delivery van had knocked into it and it had been sawn off and made safe, leaving a deep darkness hanging over our house and those nearby. We would wait until spring for the lamp post to be fixed. Despite the silence and the dark, I didn't feel lonely. I knew I wasn't the only one up at this hour.

There were religious all over the country – all over the world – awake and praying the Liturgy of Hours. It was a comfort to join my prayers with theirs in the silence of the night and pray together.

Lucy Russell's book *Who Do I Say I Am?* is available from Redemptorist Publications, www.rpbbooks.co.uk

Dear Lord, Mary's "Yes" brought Jesus into our world. Be with all families who are expecting a new baby this Christmas. Watch over, protect and bless my family, and all those I know and love, as we celebrate your birth. Amen.

Blessed!

by Michael George

The Annunciation is an account of blessings: Mary is blessed to be chosen as the Mother of God, the human race is blessed by the imminent birth of Jesus. Blessings are gifts and opportunities to grow closer to God.

Some events are likely to be more instantly-recognisable as blessings than others: the birth of a longed-for child or an unexpected job opportunity during a time of unemployment, for example. These are dramatic events. They may be direct answers to specific prayer.

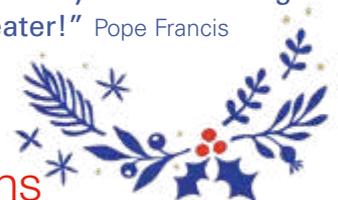
Everyday life is not so dramatic but is full of blessings. Every interaction with another person,

every smile and every frown, every joy and every challenge is a blessing; we are given the gift and are invited to respond in a way that draws us closer to God.

Response begins with recognition and gratitude. These final Advent days provide a perfect time for reflecting on and being thankful for all God's blessings.

After many years in the classroom, Michael George is now a lay school chaplain.

"Do not be afraid to tell Jesus that you too want to be a part of his love story in this world, that you are ready for something greater!" Pope Francis



Merry Christmas from all of us at Redemptorist Publications

Today: 2 Samuel 7:1-5. 8-12, 14, 16 Romans 16:25-27 Luke 1:26-38	Monday: Song of Songs 2:8-14 Luke 1:39-45	Tuesday: 1 Samuel 1:24-28 Luke 1:46-56	Wednesday: Malachi 3:1-4. 23-24 Luke 1:57-66	Thursday: Mass in the Morning: 2 Samuel 7:1-5. 8-12, 14, 16 Luke 1:67-79	Friday: Vigil Mass: Isaiah 62:1-5 Acts 13:16-17, 22-25 Matthew 1:1-25	Mass During the Night: Isaiah 9:1-7 Titus 2:11-14 Luke 2:1-14	Dawn Mass: Isaiah 62:11-12 Titus 3:4-7 Luke 2:15-20	Mass During the Day: Isaiah 52:7-10 Hebrews 1:1-6 John 1:1-18	Saturday: Acts 6:8-10; 6; 21:1-3 Matthew 10:17-22	Next Sunday: Genesis 15:1-6; 21:1-3 Hebrews 11:8, 11-12, 17-19 Luke 2:22-40
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