

The Annunciation

This is a favourite subject for so many artists who have pictured it in many beautiful ways

A print of this example, part of an Altar piece fresco by Barocci (1571) is on my wall at home.



The National Gallery contains some wonderful examples by such as Duccio and this over door panel by Fra Filippo Lippi (1450)



A more modern picture, (1898) portraying the angel as a beam of light, by Henry Tanner



But today I would like to talk about this one by Carlo Crivelli 'The Annunciation with Saint Emidius'
Painted for an Altar piece from Ascoli Piceno, Italy. (now in the National Gallery)



The Angel Gabriel has landed on the street beside the city's patron Saint on 25th March 1486.

A date having double significance, 25th March being the feast of the Annunciation in the church calendar and the same date that the Pope granted the city 'Liberatas Ecclesiastica', powers of self-government.

The pope's own messenger can be seen on the bridge above in the process of handing over the charter. The painting therefore celebrates the joining of the political and religious.

Perhaps more importantly, by putting the two together in one painting of what was then contemporary Italy it brought the Nativity story into the artist's own time and said 'the Good News is for our time and our city'

Many artists through the ages have done the same, giving their paintings a timeless and eternal quality, such as the example by Tanner above.

In this picture a beam from the bright light in the sky, representing God, shines a light through the window and a dove (the Holy Spirit) straight to the virgin who is sitting dutifully at her desk studying her scriptures. A peacock sits above, a symbol; of good things to come, immortality and with the

all-seeing eye in its feathers. As a mirror of the dove the messenger on the bridge holds a cage with a carrier a pigeon. The Angel carries a lily to represent purity and the Saint holds a model of the city in his arms.

The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore, the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.

Luke 1. 35

And Mary said,

'My soul magnifies the Lord,

and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.

His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm;

he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;

he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.

He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,

according to the promise he made to our ancestors,

to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.' Luke 1. 46-55