

Today's gospel reading is one of the most well-known in all scripture: the Annunciation. It has been the subject of artists and poets for many, many centuries. It has also been the inspiration for much poetry throughout the centuries. Some of the medieval and late medieval artists gave the Annunciation a terribly grand setting. I am thinking, for example, of Jan van Eyck, whose 15th century painting shows Mary in what looks like a great cathedral; she is robed in blue damask and he is dressed in a sumptuously bejewelled cope and has a crown upon his head. This is typical of that time, but it has less appeal to contemporary taste. God always chooses the small, the weak, the vulnerable, the poor and the unconsidered, to serve his work in the world, which is why Jesus was born in a stable among the animals – and that's the only reason the angels could be there. Animals and angels need each other. A contemporary poet, Kathleen Wakefield, describes the angel not proclaiming the message, but whispering it in Mary's ear as she was sewing:

*When she heard infinity
whispered in her ear, did the flashing
scissors in her fingers fall
to the wooden floor and the spool unravel,
the spider's sly cradle tremble with love?*

In other words, even the tiny creature on its cobweb in the corner of the room shared in this quiet, humble yet earth-breaking moment. Whenever there are God-centred moments in our lives, they invariably appear in this way –

while we are going about our ordinary, everyday chores. They are all around us when we are open to their presence. And because they are ordinary and everyday, they can be revelations of the extraordinary. We don't have to struggle for the grandiose – that has its place, of course, but not in the pilgrim heart. None of us need be afraid of being unremarkable; even though we live in a world that is driven by the urge to be someone, to be special, to be famous, an influencer, a celebrity. Mary would have been about fifteen years of age at the time of the Annunciation and quite unremarkable in every way except that she had been chosen for the highest honour by God – maybe that's why he chose her.

The German mystic and poet Angelus Silesius said that we must become 'pregnant' with God, just as Mary did; in one particular poem he said that we must hear Gabriel's annunciation as clearly as Mary – for if it does not live in us, it remains but a pretty story. Our 21st century ears are perhaps not used to language like 'becoming pregnant with God' but when the gynaecological veneer is rubbed away, we are left with a profound spiritual idea: that God must be embodied in us so that Christ may be continually born into this world.