

Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, Apr 8th 2013

The feast of the Annunciation is about interruptions. It is about hope.

Renaissance artists depicted the Annunciation in their imaginations, but the prosaic reality cannot have been that this simple Jewish maiden was sitting around in fine clothes waiting for an angelic visitor. She would have been going about the ordinary family chores, perhaps preparing for – or at least thinking of – her forthcoming marriage to an older man who, biblical scholars speculate, was most likely a widower with children by his first wife. Then, like a bolt out of the blue, here is this messenger from God, interrupting her tidy, scripted life.

We rightly celebrate Mary's "yes" to God, like Abraham's "yes" two millennia earlier. In doing so it is easy to overlook the fact of the interruption. Our own lives are filled with interruptions – things that happen that change our plans, that make demands or present opportunities we hadn't imagined or wanted – illness, deaths, visitors, phone calls, rejections, on and on. We imagine our lives as a smooth progression, with interruptions disturbing an ordered life. But it is more likely that our lives really consist as much of our interruptions as they do of a supposed routine. Many, perhaps most, of what we think of as interruptions are instances in which God is helping us refocus. Can we pay attention, as did Mary? Can we say "yes" and go where God leads us?

And hope. Not a rose-colored glasses, power-of-positive-thinking type of optimism. Pregnancy is about real hope, the sense that life has meaning, that new life, with its infinite potential, opens up that meaning again and again. Mary's accepting of her awkward pregnancy is an expression of that hope, that God is in charge of the universe, that God can be trusted. In fact, God's trustworthiness is the only real basis for hope that any of us has. Sometimes the age in which we live seems to be without hope. The institutions we trusted – government, banks, church, professionals – have all let us down. Today's feast is itself, if you will, an interruption that subtly reminds us that God can be trusted. Look what came of Mary's trust.

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