



But Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?” And the angel said to her in reply,

“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 called holy, the Son of God.

Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord.

May it be done to me according to your word.”

LUKE 1:34-35;38

THE ANNUNCIATION AND ST. ANN

In gazing on the image of St. Ann, Mary's mother, with Mary and Gabriel, what do you notice? Where do you see yourself? Can you imagine yourself there? Maybe you stand next to St. Ann outside the door, or maybe you're a friend who was visiting Mary when Gabriel arrives. Wherever you are in this image, consider the perspective of St. Ann.

A mother brings her daughter's laundry to her, a simple act of love, and encounters this most incredible sight. As she waits to be permitted entry, hoping to give her daughter privacy, she learns astonishing news.

"How can this be?"

Surely, this is a question Mary's mother is also asking: "How can this be? And why must this happen to *my* daughter?"

As any parent can relate, Ann is both protective and in awe of her child. In these trying years of pandemic, our communities have borne witness to many difficult things the children in our lives have carried with grace — mask wearing, virtual school, an inability to spend time with family and friends. Not only have we stood in awe of their courage but we have worked tirelessly to protect them from harm and encourage them in the face of uncertainty. Similarly, Ann hopes to support her

child in whatever way she can, and especially in the uncertainty she faces in freely choosing to give birth to the Son of God. How do you imagine St. Ann comforting Mary in those first few moments after the angel Gabriel leaves her? Perhaps they sit speechless for a while, or cry together in wonder and fear.

The story of the Annunciation is one of relationship and accompaniment. God reaches out to us, expresses a desire for intimacy with us and then leaves us to freely choose whether or not to engage in relationship. However, we are never alone. Rather, we are offered accompaniment, support and encouragement in the form of those who love us and in those relationships with family and friends who are similarly seeking holiness.

What is God asking you to bring into the world? Who is supporting you in it? How do your relationships with the "St. Anns" of our lives help us to better hold space for what God is doing in it? Conversely, how are you supporting others in their own journey toward holiness? Finally, when life feels difficult or impossible, whose accompaniment reminds you of God's desire for you?