Feo Belcari

The Representation of the Annunciation to Our Lady the Virgin Mary by the Angel Gabriel


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To the magnificent
Piero di Cosimo de’ Medici

If our forebears maintained temples
to do such honour to false and empty gods,
how much more should good Christians do
for Jesus Christ, the true Lord?

More than others you and your father
have put your hand to this, with perfect heart.
More than the Romans you deserve to receive
the world’s praise and God’s great love.

Since I see that you have undertaken
to honour the blessed Virgin Annunciate
in many ways, as can be seen,

I have taken some time from my waking hours
and I send you this mystery,
as the Church celebrates it, recited in verse.

*Deo gratias.*
First an Angel announces what is to be done saying:

In the name of immense, eternal God,
Father and Son and Holy Ghost,
to whom supreme honour, devout and pious
be always rendered in word and deed everywhere.
In his praise and glory I begin
my words, to draw you under the mantle
of his perfect love, in such manner and form
that you follow always in the footsteps of virtue.

When the time and the hour approached
that the eternal Word would take flesh,
the blessed Angels, without delay,
all kneeled to beg
the heavenly Father, worshipped by all,
saying, “May it please you to free us
from the sin of Adam, and, and to break down
the doors of Limbo, and to fill your court.

Then Peace and Mercy
prayed on Man’s behalf with sweet reason,
but Truth and Justice disagreed
and attacked them for such words.
Highest Wisdom made peace
among the Virtues with his incarnation,
which is the mystery that we want to recite,
so may it please you to watch in silence.

A Angel calls the Prophets and the Sibyls by name, and each one
appears when called, and says what is written below.
The Prophet Isaiah:

Behold the Virgin who will conceive
and then she will give birth, yet remain a virgin.
The name of her Son will be
Emmanuel, which means in translation
God with us, and he will eat
milk and honey, so that standing up for what is right
he knows how to flee evil that is sinful
and choose good that is virtuous.
The Prophet Daniel:
   One night I saw in a vision
and lo, the fair Son of Man came
and into his jurisdiction was given
honour and rule, like a noble orb.
People and languages of every nation
come serve him as members of his household.
When the Saint of Saints comes
the Hebrews Kings will all be gone.

The Prophet David:
   The Lord Father said to my Lord:
   “Sit at my right hand, equal to me in power.”
   My Lord God also swore to me
this great infallible truth:
   “The fruit of your womb, humble and holy,
   I shall place on my throne in essence.
   My son, who is infinite truth,
will be born on earth to give life.

The Ægrippan Sibyl:
   The invisible Word will by touched
and will germinate as a root.
It will be dry, like a bitter leaf,
and it will not appear beautiful and happy.
The maternal womb will keep it safe?
and it will be born of woman as a God,
and then be treated by others as a wicked man.

The Libyan Sibyl:
   Behold that day will come soon
that will enlighten the shuttered shadows,
and the enigmas and prophecies of the great synagogue
will be solved, and the lips
of pious people will be unlocked.
The King of the Living will be seen, and his limbs
will be felt with the womb of a true Virgin,
and by her womb all men will be weighed.

The Frygian Sibyl:
   God will strike the powerful of the earth.
From highest Heaven the almighty will come to us,
and he will seal the council without war.
The Virgin will then receive the annunciation.
In the deserted valleys it is unlocked.
This is what I say to you all.

The Samian Sibyl:
   The rich being born of the poor
will be worshipped by the beasts of the earth.
The Eritrean Sibyl:
God has looked from his home on high
at his humble ones, and in the last days
he will be born, I say, with this miracle:
of a Hebrew Virgin of comely
manners, her son, with no other obstacle,
will rest in earthly cradles.

The Delphic Sibyl:
The prophet is to be born without his mother’s
80 coitus: his introit is a Virgin.

The Persian Sibyl:
Behold, the beast will be trampled,
and the great rejoicing Lord will be conceived.
The womb of the blessed Virgin
will be the salvation of the peoples of the earth.
Born of her, his feet will be
the strength to bear all great burdens.

The Hellespontic Sibyl:
To prophesy one word will suffice:
88 Christ Jesus will be born of the chaste one.

The Virgin Mary arises at midnight and kneels to pray and says:
O highest, eternal and almighty God,
vouchsafe to hear your creature Mary.
Give me grace that I should be fervent
in loving you with a pure heart and mind,
and my neighbour and all people
as much as it pleases you, First Nature.
Then make me hate every vice,
and make me grateful for all blessings.

Give me so much of your true light
that I should live always in perfect humility,
and that with all virtue and good behaviour
I should keep by body pure and my soul unblemished.
Fill me with your infinite flow
of wisdom, that I should be acceptable
in your sight, and make me do and say
what most pleases you, sweet my Lord.

And I beseech you also, with all my heart,
that I should see that singular Virgin
who will conceive you, great Lord,
by the Holy Ghost, without human touch.
And I pray you, my highest creator,
that you should wish to preserve my limbs
in such good health that I may go to her
and become the servant of such a maid.

_The all the Angels of Paradise kneel before God the Father, and_
_ONE of them on behalf of them all says:_

O eternal Father, o immense power,
o highest Height, o infinite light
Man whom you made so excellently
in your likeness, Lord and Ruler,
five thousand years or more in penance
has been confined, and even now leads
his descendants in infernal Limbo

for one single sin, called mortal.

May that great charity, that holy love
that led you to create him so worthy,
makes you have pity on his error
so that he can come to your fair kingdom,
for well you know, sweet Father and Lord,
that Man was created for this noble purpose:
to restore the heavenly seats,

not to fill the pits of hell.

Let your virtue triumph over his sin,
let your light draw him from darkness.
Through grace and love let his failing,
so bitter and harsh, be forgiven;
for the worse the punishment he deserved,
for being a murderer, traitor and thief,
the great your goodness and mercy

and charity will be revealed.

_MERCY kneels and prays to God the Father saying:_

O mighty creator, first principle,
o immense unity, o eternal Father,
man whom you made from mud and dirt
has been in Hell for five thousand years.
In my opinion, I think and believe
that you do not wish him to remain there forever.
If you are ever to show your mercy,

it seem to me time to draw him forth form discord.

_Peace kneels and prays to God the Father and says:_

O heavenly father, o incomprehensible peace,
o first essence, o unchanging mind,
Adam was made of feeling flesh
and he was tempted by the lovable woman.
Do you wish for this reason to keep him for ever
in such a terrible prison, and be implacable?
Show your most holy Mercy
and me, your Peace, sweet and most dulcet.

GOD THE FATHER replies to Mercy and to Peace:
Your words delight and please me
because they make this holy court beautiful,
but because I am capable of all virtue
I want to hear your consorts,
Justice and Truth, who hold this man
in contumacy, with such pain and death.

And turning to Justice and Truth, God says to them:
Give your opinion, if you please,
whether Man is to be saved and death extinguished.

Justice and Truth speak together in secret, then Justice replies saying:
We have heard, o true and just Father,
what our sisters ask you.
Adam, sinning with his followers,
must not sit in these beautiful seats.
Mercy and Peace are comely virtues, but we are not inferior to them.
If you draw Man forth from eternal suffering,
then Truth fails and Justice dies.

The Father, seeing their disagreement, entrusts the question to the Son saying:
I have entrusted judgment to the hands
of my Son, eternal wisdom.
To him I entrust this dispute
for he is the good means of all holy things.
When he casts his just and true sentence between you
each will have what she seeks and desires.
Recite to him all your reasons
so that all of you will win this case.

The four Virtues turn to the Son, and Mercy begins to speak and says:
O eternal Word, o immense beauty,
image and splendour of the almighty Father,
we are sent to you, our Lord,
by the Father, your infinite Highness,
because of difference, and quickly
we will outline the issues,
beseeking you that you restore us to harmony
because the Virtues should not be in disharmony.

It seemed to me, blessed Mercy,
that Adam and his descendants
should be brought forth from all his woe.
For one single sin so bitter
he has been in Limbo for five thousand years.
O sweet my Lord, you see how great
man’s calamity is on account of the deceit of others.
If you do not pardon him and give him salvation,
I am almost dead, and I am your great virtue.

TRUTH replies and says to the Son of God:
O truth, o eternal wisdom,
o first mould of this exemplary species,
you see how artfully Mercy is behaving
with this speech of hers.
Under the guise of pity she is killing and prostrating
her companion virtues, and would rather love
the creature who has rebelled against you
than me, your own Truth, and her sister.

MERCY turns towards Truth and says:
I’m not setting out to spite you,
blessed Truth, my beloved sister.
If my pity is against your wishes,
you are cruel and merciless as well,
because you will not forgive Man his sin
and you want me to perish and die along with him.
Must you always, so cruelly dutiful,
leave me dead, and Man in such a dwelling place.

TRUTH answers Mercy saying:
My duty, which is so glorious,
will not be cancelled by your words,
because God, who is just, true and holy,
will not wrong his virtues.

Then TRUTH turns to the Son and says:
And you, mighty Lord, if you free Mankind
who rebelled against you from his great lamentation,
then you will overturn and set aside your Father’s sentence
that says: Let Adam die, and his seed.

MERCY says to Truth:
If this sin is not forgiven,
then I find no need for myself in Heaven.

TRUTH says to Mercy:
Our Father passed judgement
that Adam should die, and this is not an empty dream

MERCY to Truth:
I’d be an empty dream if the chosen souls
were not saved as I desire.
TRUTH says to Mercy:
Say what you like, you will not kill me.

Mercy replies:
And you will not keep me forever dead.

Peace, hearing Truth and Mercy arguing, says to them:
Listen to me, for I am your Peace.
It does you no honour to utter such words,
because with us our deeds
are usually tranquil, and soft and calm.

Then she turns to the Son of God and says sweetly:
O eternal Word, show us in your sweetness
your supreme wisdom, and grant Man
that which Mercy and Peace desire,
for Adam is waiting in hope and in faith.

The Son of God replies to them all:
My infinite and supreme wisdom
can soon unravel this difficult knot.
Having heard this dispute
I have found a worthy means and a holy way.
Bring me pen and paper to write my sentence
and at once I will give my judgement and sentence.
It will be so sweet and just and pious
that each of you will have what she desires in full.

The Virtues bring him paper and quill and he writes his verdict and gives
what he has written to Peace for her to read, and Peace reads it and
says:
Our King, who is divine wisdom
pronounces his sentence in this fashion:
Truth says: “I am left lifeless
unless Man who sinned against God dies.”
Mercy claims: “I am dead
unless Man is freed from the pain of death.”
Let a way be found to die well and make death good,
and each will have what she has asked for.

When they heard the sentence, they took fright and agreed that Man
should die, but mercifully. But they asked how can death be made good,
saying:
How can death be made good
when just the thought of it
is horrible, not to mention having to taste
its dire outcome and the painful experience of it?
Your sentence leads us into dark places,
wherefore please deign to cast light on it.
Our confusion is no less now than before
unless you explain your holy counsel.

THE SON OF GOD replies:
The death of the wicked is always bad;
that of the saints is good and precious.
Let someone be found who is of such virtue
that he is pleased to die for such a purpose,
and who does not deserve the pain of death.
In this way the anguish of death
will have no power to hold the innocent man
by will rather be the gateway to my joyous kingdom.

This advice pleased everybody so that PEACE spoke as follows:
This advice is so just and holy
that it will put an end to our disputes.
Go, Mercy, and search all over
heaven to see if you can find someone of such virtue.
And you, truth, search every corner
of the earth for the salvation of Mankind
and if either finds anyone of such value,
find out if he wishes to die for love.

Mercy searches all over Heaven, and Truth descends to Earth and
searches throughout human kind, and no-one was found in Heaven with
charity enough, or on Earth innocent enough. Then they returned and the
Virtues consulted together and Peace said to them: “You don’t know
anything. Nobody is to be found to do good except one man. And
therefore it means that the one who gave us this advice should help us.”
And PEACE said to the Son of God:
Please hear what I have to ask and explain,
o first counsel and splendour of your Father.
Mercy has searched all the thrones
of the angelic throngs in Heaven.
Truth sought out your fair creatures
on earth, in search of such a gift,
and since we find no-one who can do this,
having given your advice, now grant us your aid urgently.

THE SON OF GOD sighed and resolved to grant his aid and redeem
Mankind, and he said to them all:
When Adam broke my divine precept
he acted against me, against infinite good,
wherefore Justice desires that for his sin
he should be punished without end.
Therefore it is necessary to find someone so perfect
that he is clothed in infinite worth.
Neither man nor angel can do this,
only god can be worth of this.

To me, the Son, has been given
truth, light and eternal wisdom, 
and every sin that deprives Man of life 
has ignorance as its guiding light. 
If ignorance inflicts a mortal wound 
wisdom tends it and treats it, 
so it is for me to eliminate sin

for even so it is prophesied by all.

I am almost sorry I created Man 
for on his account I am constrained to suffer death. 
Go, Gabriel, to Limbo, and knock at the door, 
and say that soon I will open those gates: 
by paying the ransom for the forbidden apple 
I will lead them with me to this heavenly court, 
and show my infinite goodness

by giving eternal life after sin.

The Angel Gabriel goes to Limbo and knocks at the gates and says:

Adam, listen to the Angel Gabriel
for I am sent to you by God on high.
In Heaven there has been a fine dispute 
over you among the Virtues, I never heard 
such sweet words, and when it was done 
the eternal Word, all sweet and holy, 
has decided to take flesh, and with his holy death

he will lead you to Heaven, where there is singing and dancing.

Adam replies to the Angel:

The punishment that has followed on my sin 
shows how great my guilt was, 
but it is even clearer if I have to be 
redeemed by the death of God, 
and given that I rebelled against God 
(though I always hoped in the Messiah and Saviour), 
I rejoice and am comforted to leave Limbo, 
but it pains me the more that God should die for me.

When the Angel returns, the Son of God says to him:

Go quickly, Gabriel, to Galilee 
to the city of Nazareth, 
and you will find a Virgin among the Jews 
made to Joseph. 
Her name is Mary, and as one divine 
she will be exalted for her humility. 
You will greet her virginal state

as is required by such a mystery.

You will announce to her that she is full of grace 
and that I, the Lord God, am always with her. 
To save Mankind and to satisfy her desire,
I wish for my great love of him to take flesh, for I see how his sin torments him, locked in Limbo and unable to leave. While remaining a virgin in all her heart and body she will conceive such an excellent fruit.

The Holy Ghost will come upon her and she will be surrounded by his light. He who will be born so wondrously will be the son of God, eternal guide. Let her call him Jesus, and under her mantle all men will be saved who lead good lives, and make this speech in such a way that she consents to this incarnation.

The Angel Gabriel goes to the Virgin Mary and finds her praying as she meditated on the “Ecce Virgo concipiet”\(^1\) and he says to her reverently:

God save you, for you are full of grace, the great Lord God is with you. Be blessed, o serene Virgin, among all women of desire.

The Virgin Mary stands up in fear and fright: Mary, come, fear not, for I come not to harm you but to bring you joy. You have found grace with the Lord, so hear my words with rejoicing.

Behold, you will conceive a son and you will bring him forth, and you will call him Jesus, and he will be beyond compare, and you will hear men call him the Son of the Highest, and by divine counsel you will see him sit on the throne of the Father in the house of Jacob, forever, his rule will endure for all eternity.

The Virgin Mary asks: How can what you have told me be true when I have no carnal knowledge of any man.

The Angel answers: The perfect gift of the Holy Ghost will come most perfectly upon you, and the virtue of God will cast its holy shadow within your breast and all over you so that he who will be born of you

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\(^1\) Communion antiphon for the Fourth Sunday of Advent; Isaiah 7:14.
368 will be called the holy Son of God.

   And behold, Elizabeth, your sister-in-law,
   has conceived a son in her old age.
   It is six months since this grace
   was given to her by divine virtue,
   when everybody called her barren.
   God, the greatest salvation, can do all things.

   THE VIRGIN MARY kneels and crossing her arms on her breast she says humbly:
   Behold the Handmaiden of the Lord God.

376 Let it be done unto me according to your holy words.

   Then the Holy Ghost comes upon her, and there is great rejoicing in
   Heaven, and the Angel returns to Heaven.

   Finally AN Angel says:
   Having heard and understood the infinite love
   that sweet God has shown to you in your ingratitude,
   and the great humility that was in the heart
   of Mary, through whom you are saved,
   all must be full of fervour
   and follow virtue free from sin,
   carrying the Virgin Annunciate within their hearts.

384 Let all go on their way: you are free to depart.