



Rosa Mystica Reflection

(December 8, 2020)

Mary: Hearer of the Word

December 8th is the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. In Catholic tradition, it honors Mary's state of being without sin from the moment of her conception. She was still very much human, a physical person with the range of emotions and senses we all share. When the Angel Gabriel visited her, all we know is that her elevated humanity was recognized with the familiar words we still say today more than 2,000 years later, "Hail Mary, full of Grace!

But how do you communicate elevated humanity in art and is it only for Mary? In the visual theology of Marian art, recorded as the Annunciation, Mary's complexion, features, clothing, and surroundings change over the centuries. It is the consistency of her gaze and stillness in her facial expression as she encounters Gabriel that captures the profound and courageous act that continues to benefit humanity. Her elevated humanity is revealed in her expression of stillness. That stillness reveals an equanimity that made her courage possible.

In other depictions of Mary, as Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, she is shown dressed in white and blue robes; with a halo of stars and rays of light behind her; and standing in clouds. The equanimity from which she becomes Mary: Hearer of the Word and Mother of God, an inner state of being, is like the sky. Placed in the sky, she also metaphorically becomes the bridge between humanity and the Divine. A title for Mary over the centuries is "Our Lady of the Way," (shown artistically in iconography pointing to a Child Jesus seated next to her as the path to salvation). Her equanimity, a human capability accessible to all of us, enabled her to face unique adversity.

An angelic presence appearing to a young unmarried girl living as a minority in a Jewish community under Roman rule...who told her she was to have a child out of wedlock...who would become the Son of God...Mary had plenty of reasons to act out of fear and say no. As one of the most courageous people in human history, she said yes. For her act of courage, we will be eternally grateful. We can also have hope. Mary showed us that as a person, no more or less than any of us, she had a sense of inner tranquility that enabled her to act with courage and faith.