

## **Message from Robin+**

*Purify our conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that your Son Jesus Christ, at his coming, may find in us a mansion prepared for himself; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.*

*Book of Common Prayer, page 212, Collect for the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent*

As we approach the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent, my thoughts have turned to Mary. In our Gospel reading we will hear about the Angel Gabriel's visit and announcement to Mary, and just as importantly, her response. The collect for this Sunday is one of my favorites. It is brief but piercing in its request. We might hesitate before praying this powerful prayer if we read it carefully first. Purify our conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that your Son Jesus Christ, at his coming, may find in us a mansion prepared for himself. In just one sentence we pray for God to purify our conscience, visit us daily, and find in us a mansion prepared for Christ. Every Advent I reach this point and find the whole idea of Incarnation so astounding that I am left speechless. I imagine myself in that time and place and am transformed, experiencing the presence of the Holy.

I invite you to take time this week to sit with Mary and pray this collect. Be still, let God speak to you of your own conscience in need of purification. Invite God to visit you and clean house so that the mansion of your heart will be made ready for the holy infant who is on the way. I leave you with one of my favorite Advent poems.

## **The Annunciation by Denise Levertov**

We know the scene: the room, variously furnished,  
almost always a lectern, a book; always  
the tall lily.

Arrived on solemn grandeur of great wings,  
the angelic ambassador, standing or hovering,  
whom she acknowledges, a guest.

But we are told of meek obedience. No one mentions  
courage

The engendering Spirit  
did not enter her without consent. God waited.

She was free  
to accept or refuse, choice  
integral to humanness.

Aren't there annunciations  
of one sort or another in most lives?  
Some unwillingly undertake great destinies,  
enact them in sullen pride,  
uncomprehending.

More often those moments  
when roads of light and storm  
open from darkness in a man or woman,  
are turned away from  
in dread, in a wave of weakness, in despair  
and with relief.  
Ordinary lives continue.

God does not smite them.  
But the gates close, the pathway vanishes.

She had been a child who played, ate, spelt  
like any other child – but unlike others,  
wept only for pity, laughed  
in joy not triumph.  
Compassion and intelligence  
fused in her, indivisible.

Called to a destiny more momentous  
than any in all of Time,  
she did not quail,  
only asked

a simple, “How can this be?”  
and gravely, courteously,  
took to heart the angel’s reply,  
perceiving instantly  
the astounding ministry she was offered:

to bear in her womb  
Infinite weight and lightness; to carry  
in hidden, finite inwardness,  
nine months of Eternity; to contain  
in slender vase of being,  
the sum of power –  
in narrow flesh,  
the sum of light.

Then bring to birth,  
push out into air, a Man-child  
needing, like any other,  
milk and love –

but who was God.