



Annunciation by Dante Gabriel Rossetti 1850

## “Do not be afraid, Mary.” Luke 1.30

The whole global community has been wrapped in fear for a long time. An insidious and invisible virus has been holding us hostage. And because it is new to the world, it has pressed the button of our deepest dread – that of the unknown.

‘Do not fear!’ ‘Do not be afraid’: the pages of the Bible are punctuated with reassuring regularity by such words from a God who longs to calm us in the face of uncertainty. Within Jesus’ birth narratives alone, that same injunction not to be afraid is given to Zechariah, to Joseph and to the shepherds. And, of course, to Mary.

We see an initially fearful response in Rossetti’s painting of her encounter with Gabriel. The cowering girl on the bed is respectful but clearly terrified. She backs away from the angel, eyes lowered, shoulders hunched. Gabriel’s left hand shows us what he’s saying: “Hush, it’s alright – don’t be afraid, Mary.”

Our fear, like Mary’s, has threatened to paralyse and diminish us. But pandemic has revealed something stronger than fear, something we’ve seen daily in our own communities and on our screens: Love. And we see it too in Mary. Her initial reaction to the shockingly unexpected and unknown is to shrink back. But Gabriel’s tenderness and the Holy Spirit’s presence (notice the dove above the angel’s soothing hand) warm and open her to new

possibilities. Her fear is transformed into something creative and life-giving. We know that after gentle conversation between them, she will say yes, will hand herself over to Love.

There is one bud still to break on the lily stem Gabriel offers. For us as for Mary, a yes to God’s request for a home within us will change everything, the smell of fear will be overpowered by the perfume of love, and we and the world around us will begin to bloom.

**“If you are so weary with the struggle of living that you have no strength even to want God, yet are still dissatisfied that you don’t, you are already keeping Advent in your life.”**

Maria Boulding

## Prayer

**Come Lord Jesus,  
make your home within us  
and turn our fear to love.**

**Amen**