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From time to time in our life we encounter embarrassing experiences. Talking about those awkward incidents, I shall not forget what happened to me about 10 years ago. One afternoon, a middle-aged man knocked the door of my house and asked to me, ‘Are you Jong Soo Park?’ When I said, ‘Yes, I’m Jong Soo Park,’ he gave me a letter on which my name was written, and asked me to sign on the place of recipient.

After signing for it I started to read the letter, and soon found that it was not for me. I went out to find the delivery man, but he was already gone. The letter was issued by the Magistrates Courts of Queensland asking Jong Soo Park to attend the courtroom because somebody had accused him of causing damage to a car, about \$5,000. But, I was not in Queensland when the car accident occurred. Yes, the defendant Jong Soo Park was a different person with the same name.

I wrote a letter to the Courts, and they said that I should prove that I am a different Jong Soo Park. So, I wrote a statutory declaration letter with help from my friend who was studying law and sent it to the Courts with some proofs that I was living in Melbourne when the car accident took place and the car mentioned in the letter was not my own car.

They replied, however, it was not enough. They said I must defend myself at the trial or pay indemnities. I was in a really dark place; there was nothing I could do to prove myself. But, fortunately the problem was resolved more easily than I expected by a call from my lawyer, whom I met in a free legal service, to the plaintiff’s lawyer. You know what? The plaintiff’s lawyer already knew that I was not the person, but accused me just because I had used the same name. Thanks to my lawyer, they dropped charges against me immediately and sent me a legal letter that they would not contact me again about that case. Since then, I am very careful not to receive a wrong letter.

[2]

In today’s gospel reading, Luke 1, we can also find a very embarrassing incident. Compared to this event, my experience is nothing. That is the Annunciation, in which the angel Gabriel visited the Virgin Mary and told her that she would be the mother of Christ.

What shocking news for Mary! It was also dangerous news to her in those days. If a virgin was pregnant, she would have been stoned according to the Jewish religious laws. So, it is not difficult to imagine her feeling when Gabriel delivered her the news. According to Luke 1:29-30, she was confused, disturbed and afraid.

An Italian painter Fra Carnevale's *The Annunciation* painted in 1445 describes well Mary's inner feeling at that time.



This painting is beautiful; I love its colours and patterns, which give us a sense of warmth. Now the angel Gabriel kneels down before Mary presenting her with a white lily as if proposing her. The white lily is a symbol of Mary depicting her purity. However, look at Mary's face.



She looks confused, disturbed, and afraid. There is no hint of joy. Given the fact that she was not yet married and the culture and atmosphere of the day, her response is not surprising at all.



The path through the small gate in the centre of the picture seems to show the long journey that Mary was to undergo as the mother of Christ. The beautiful blue sky reveals that the day was just one of ordinary days, but one special thing is found in it. Yes, the Holy Spirit illustrated as a dove.



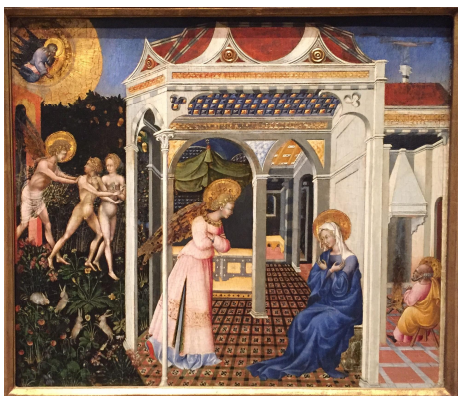
In verse 35 the angel says, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God.” The Holy Spirit the angel mentioned is now coming upon Mary. What is remarkable is that this painting contains the scene where Mary did not yet received the Holy Spirit

In Luke 1:46-55, the next passages of today’s gospel reading, there is Mary’s Song of Praise, one of the most wonderful praises recorded in the Bible. In verses 47-48, she declared, “How my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour! For he took notice of his lowly servant girl, and from now on all generations will call me blessed.” This saying is totally opposite to her sense of fear.

What happened to her? Yes, the Holy Spirit filled her heart and all her life. The Spirit removed her sense of confusion, trouble and fear, and instead filled her with hope, peace, joy and love. At this point, we should not also ignore Mary’s strong faith to accept the Holy Spirit.



The highlight of today’s gospel reading is verse 38. After listening to the angel’s message, Mary responded like this in the end, “I am the Lord’s servant. May everything you have said about me come true.” Although this faithful confession looks trivial, this faithful obedience was a channel of changing the world. I would like to show you another painting of the Annunciation.





[3]

This picture was painted by Giovanni Di Paolo in 1435. This artwork is my favourite painting of this event. It contains a number of important factors in it. Let us look at Mary first.



Her gesture shows us her confusion and fear, and the angel looks as if persuading her is difficult. It is interesting to compare Mary's face and gesture with those of Gabriel, which is illustrating the scene dramatically and telling that it would have taken a long time for Mary to accept the divine invitation. It's a possible and convincing interpretation.



In the left upper part, the artist drew the Trinity. It contains the images of God the father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. There is no image of the dove symbolising the Spirit, but the Trinity looks as if it is waiting for Mary's faithful acceptance before being ready to come down to her.

Under the image of the Trinity, there are three people; strictly speaking, they are one angel and two people. Who are they? What are they doing here? As some may guess, the man and woman are Adam and Eve, and the angel repelled them from the Garden of Eden after the Fall under God's supervision.

Interestingly, the angel seems to push them into the scene of the Annunciation. Here, the artist connected these two stories; he wanted to express that the events of the Annunciation and Jesus’ Incarnation were for restoring the broken relationship between God and human beings. The essence of the Bible was beautifully captured in one drawing like this. How smart he was!

There is one more thing deserving our attention here. Look at the man on the right side. Can you recognise who he is? At first I thought he was Joseph, Jesus’ father. However, he looks so old.



He is bald and his hair is white. Considering that Joseph was a young man who was not yet married when the Annunciation occurred, he is not Joseph. Then, who is he? The artist kindly put a hint in the picture, which is a bonfire in front of the man. He is warming himself by the fire; yes, he is the apostle Peter who denied Jesus three times before a bonfire. Why did the artist include Peter here? Peter’s denial means Jesus’ suffering and death, through which the artist is talking about the core purpose of the Annunciation and Jesus’ Incarnation, that is, our salvation through the divine sacrifice.



Likewise, this painting is not just a drawing of the Annunciation, but a great panorama catching the essence of God’s creation and salvation ministry with three different parts. Remarkably, all three parts were related to confusion, disturbance, and fear each, but when they were connected within God’s grace, they were able to create a big picture of hope, peace, joy and love. At this, the event of the Annunciation played a role as the bridge forming a connection between human suffering and God’s salvation.

[4]

Sisters and brothers,

This is the real meaning of the Annunciation in which hopelessness became hopefulness. In this process, Mary was used as a core instrument by accepting the Holy Spirit. What’s important is that we were also called to do our part in God’s continual annunciation to the world as Mary did. Amen.