

Annunciations

LIBRETTO

By

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ANNUNCIATIONS is a collection of five musical compositions that make announcements about compassion. It is the first section of the **Marginal Notes** project. Revisions of this project began in 2008. *Annunciations* was the first score to be revised.

PART ONE: Johanin, an oratorio written and performed in 1969, based on the story of the annunciation to Zechariah of the birth of John the Baptist, as recorded in the *Book of Luke*. Note that the translation of “John” or “Johanin” is “God is gracious.”

Annunciation 1.: From Fear to Hope (Luke 1, Psalm 77)

Angels: “Do not be afraid, Zechariah. Your prayer is heard.
Your wife Elizabeth shall bear you a son,
And you shall call his name John.
You will have joy and gladness.
Many will sing at his birth.
He shall be great before God.
Filled with the Holy Spirit,
He will turn many:
A voice that soon will be heard,
Preparing the way before God.”

Zechariah: “I am just an old man, one old man.
My wife, Elizabeth, is much too old to bear a child.
Can you give a sign to us?”

Angels; “Do not be afraid, Zechariah. Your prayer is heard.
Fear cannot hear. Fear cannot speak.”

Zechariah: “Thou dost hold my eyelids from closing.
I am so troubled I cannot speak.
I remember the days of old.
I remember the years long ago.
Thou dost hold my eyelids from closing.” (He becomes mute.)

Annunciation 2: Compassion ends separation. (Rom. 8:39)

Woman” “Soft as a whisper,
Silent as sunrise,
Grace with its promise
Dawns in our hearts”

Man: “All that we hoped for,
All that fear threatened:
Given and opened,
Revealed to our hearts.”

Together: “In growth and union,
Comfort and solace,
Sorrow, and gladness,
Come hope’s tiny starts.”

Chorus: “No height above,
No depth below,
Can separate us
From God’s love.”

Second Woman: “Sometimes when we’re discouraged,
Walled in ourselves, confined,
Captive to fear and sorrow,
Living alone in the mind,”

First Woman: “Then in a glimpse of sunlight,
Or in the smell of rain,
Or in words that put things right,
God rescues us again.”

Chorus: “No height...”

Chorus: “First we were strangers,
Then we were friends,
Then lovers, then one.
Now, long years after,
We shall be parents.
Love will complete us.
We have a son, a new son.”

Chorus: “What, then, shall this child be?”

Annunciation:3: Grace is welcome acceptance. Embrace all accidents.

Zechariah is able to speak. He says “His name shall be John.”

Chorus: “His name shall be John.
Gracious is God to his people.”

Zechariah: “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel.
For he has redeemed and visited his people,
And has raised up for us a horn of salvation
In the house of his servant, David.”

Chorus: “Though drifting clouds that scatter,
We, frail and passing matter,
Gather, grow, and grieve.
Though all we love and cherish
Will flourish but to perish;
Though sorrow leaves us dumb,
Yet, our hearts receive
Such gifts all around,
Such invitations abound
To live in welcome!
So, while you live, live in welcome!”

PART TWO: Tennessee Song is a setting of a poem by James Agee (1949) about the annunciation to Mary, as recorded in the *Book of Luke*. The poem is quoted here and in the song with the nonexclusive permission of the James Agee Trust and the Publisher for use in nonprofit performances.

Mary was the sweetest gal, a hundred miles around,
Lively and kind, and good to see as ever might be found.
One clean March morning, Mary was a-training up her flowers
Out of their buckets on the twine, in the dewy hours.
She heard the garden gate swing ‘round. She lookt up and she seen
Great wings of a white butterfly that stood and called her “queen.”
It warn’t no butterfly on Earth, she knowed, and knowed it well.
She seen, quick as her eyes could stand, it was Archangel Gabriel.

“Mary, “ he said, “God sent me here to learn you what he aims to do.
He aims to send his son on Earth. The mother will be you.
Your son will be the finest that ever any mother bore.
Store up his childhood in your heart. It must help heal a heart that’s tore.”

And she grew prettier day by day, into a full young woman,
So sweet to see that Joseph felt afeared, umble, and common.
“Why do they come such luck to me?” He’d wonder in his prayin’.
“I’m old and slow and ornery.”

God said, “What’s that you’re sayin’?
You are the goodest man I know in all this countryside.
Therefore I choosed you for this gift of Mary for your bride.
And him that you must call your son, see you do right by him.
He is more precious in my sight than storms of seraphim.”

And like a match struck on a stove, it faded and was gone,
And Joseph laid awake and prayed till the winder showed the dawn.

They laid down in a cold, black barn. The stars worked through the walls.
The ox and jackass kept him warm, a-studyin’ in their stalls.

She could have had the best hotel, doctors, a fine, gold ring.
Name in the papers and winter flow'rs, For he was king.
He could-a had the mayor there, waitin' down the string
From the governor, and the president, For he was king.
He could have ordered summer there. Summer'd a-skipped her spring.
He could have never come to us, for he was king.

He did not need no company, play-pretties, nary a thing.
He come to us the manner he come, for he was king.

PART THREE: The Good Samaritan. This is a small cantata for the stage, presented in memory of Susan Irene Rose (1945-2008), about the familiar parable, written and first performed in Kaiserslautern at Kleber Kaserne in 1969 and later at Warrenton Presbyterian Church and, in reduction, at Fairlington Presbyterian Church. The stories of the Samaritan and the Rich Young Ruler are combined in this piece, whose central character is a rich lawyer who wants it all both in this life and the next. (*Matthew 19 and 22, Mark 10 and 12, Luke 10 and 18, Psalms 46 and 78.*).

The Scene :

The members of the chorus, a shabbily-dressed crowd milling in a street market, stand in small groups, some of them warming their hands over steam vents and barrel fires. Standing at a nearby bus stop and taxi stand, some wealthier citizens are waiting. The Lawyer, carrying a briefcase, the Priest, and the Levite, are notably better dressed and unwilling to mingle with the crowd.

Chorus: Once a lawyer, rich from learning,
Given to questions leisure prompted,
Pushed through nameless beggars crowding,
Came to question Jesus' teaching.

Lawyer: A healthy dividend accrues
To those who know the pow'r of law.
You learn in time which scales to use
And what to let the tax allow.

The lawyer clutches his briefcase.

Chorus: How tight he holds his treasure to him!
Does he fear that we will rob him?

Lawyer: A healthy dividend accrues
To those who learn the law's defense.
Find laws to serve as reference,
And then lay claim to what you choose.

Chorus: Law measured out at his exchange
Denies our talents of their range.

Stage Directions:

Entrance of Jesus: Jesus is seen only by the crowd, whose faces and appearance change

as they make way for him and speak for him. Jesus remains unseen throughout the cantata. His presence and absence are indicated by the behavior and words of the chorus. For example, at the end of this section, his departure chills the air, sending the crowd to seek warmth

Chorus: Crowding around him are beggars, and prostitutes,
Thieves, and drunks, and poor.
See how he looks at them, pressing to hold him,
And make him hear their cause.

Opressors all stand aside.
They would never have come here but for him.
They come to berate him, to addle, and bait him,
And catch him with their laws.

Priest: He's corrupted himself, touching all that filth!

Levite: What kind of scribe are you?

Priest: Don't you come to me to get yourself clean.

Both: Samaritans at my door will get as much as you!

Lawyer: Master, I have a question.
How can I gain eternal life?
Master, I have a question.
Give me the answer. What must I do?

Jesus (Chorus): What is the law? How do you read?

Lawyer: You shall love the Lord your God
With all your strength and mind,
And your neighbor as yourself,
Your neighbor as yourself.

Jesus: Truly, you have spoken.
Do this, and live.

Lawyer: I know the law and prophets.
I know the law.
You tell me to love my neighbor.
Who, Who can he be?

Jesus: Give ear, my people.
Listen to my teaching.
Incline your ears to hear
Words from my voice.
I open my mouth to you
In a parable.
Truly I will speak to you
Dark sayings of old,
That we have heard,
And we have known.

That our fathers taught us from of old.

Stage directions:

The crowd turns to watch Jesus depart. They return to huddling around the steam vent and barrel fire and looking up at the barred windows of nearby apartments. Several robbers begin to size up the Lawyer, who fearfully watches them as he goes to a nearby bus stop, closely followed by the Priest and Levite.

Chorus:

God is our refuge and our guide,
As present as the hands that give,
As welcome as the fire inside
When winter threatens all that live.

A robber, who has been sizing up the Lawyer, steps forward to stir the crowd to take advantage of the opportunity. As the lawyer walks away, the robber urges the crowd to act. The Priest and Levite watch the robbery from a safe distance. (Reference: Proverbs 1:10.)

Robber: Come on, don't you see this man
Would dispossess you when he can?
Anything we ever owned,
He took from us and said we owed.
Still owe him when we've paid the rent,

Robber & Chorus: We owe him what he never lent.

Robber: Some day we will be all paid up.

Robber & Chorus: That's when we will be carried off!

Robber: Come on, what you waiting for?
We'll spread our net just like before
We'll wait for him on the road.

Chorus: Wait for him!

Robber: What's it matter if we steal?
What's ours is his, so his is ours,
And that is how we deal.

Chorus: Ours is his, so his is ours,
And that is how we deal.

Stage Directions:

As the crowd falls back, the injured lawyer lies mid-stage near the taxi stand. The priest approaches, but not too closely.

Priest: High in the government,
To the chiefs of state,
I bring my mercy.
Mercy is my employment.
Eating is my enjoyment.

Holy days, there is plenty,
Oxen, rams, and lambs, and cattle.
Oh, rich the sauce.
Never let a drop be lost!

Brother, truly I would pause,
If you were a cleaner cause.
Chiefs, and rulers, wealthy men,
Require a priest unstained by sin.
Those great souls put up the price
For me to serve the sacrifice.

Oh, rich the sauce.
Never let a drop be lost!

Stage Directions:

The priest leaves the stage to the Lawyer and the Levite, who paces uncertainly, dragging his feet, as he justifies walking around the wounded man.

Levite: If I had gone the other road,
If I had left when I had planned,
I'd never come along this way.
I'd never seen this man.

No one saw me coming here.
No one will see me pass.
If I had gone the other road,
I'd never seen this man.

Stage Directions:

The crowd comes together around the man, helps him to a chair, gives him a glass of water, and brings the parable to a close.

Chorus: Who has shown what we believe?
And how is our redemption known?
First it comes with one who sees
Pain, unnoticed and alone;
Then he takes another's part,
Letting need, not want, decide,
Welcoming the chance to serve,
Understand, and turn aside.

See how he looks at us,
Oppressed, and oppressing.
What does he want from us?
Go and do likewise.
See him in the stranger,
Also the oppressor.
What does he want from us?
Go and do likewise.

In one who meets a need,
See him, not the creed.
What does he want from us?
Go and do likewise.

PART FOUR: *Das Leben* is a setting of the poem by the German poet, J.G. Herder. It is about a little annunciation, an insight into the nature of human existence. It is intentionally brief.

Ein Traum, Ein Traum is unser Leben.	Our life is a dream
Auf Erden hier.	here, on Earth.
Wie Schatten auf den Wogen schweben	Like shadows, we float and vanish
und schwinden wir.	over the waves
Und messen unsre tragen Tritte	And measure our heavy steps
Nach Raum und Zeit	By space and time,
Und sind, und wis'sen's nicht,	And are, and know it not,
In mitte der Ewigkeit.	In the midst of eternity.

PART FIVE: *Missa brevis*—a mass originally written for the Warrenton Chorale in 1982, and presented in 1983. Whatever one may think of transubstantiation or of the many heresies put to rest by the formulaic language of the mass, the power of this form of art and worship is undeniable. A mass summarizes the ancient interpretation of the life of Christ in a form that unifies the work and worship of the community. The creative engagement of the faithful in the words, smells, music, and actions in worship sustains their attention both during and after services.. The life of the work week, is sanctified by and balanced with the liturgical work of the worship service. Every mass is a work of redemption that provides a concrete representation of the unity of prayer and practice that is the aim of the divine life.

Settings of the Mass usually dwell meditatively on key passages, inviting one to ponder on the repetitions, but my reading of the text aloud led me to set it differently. The text proceeds breathlessly, hardly stopping for punctuation, as if trying to convey a hologram-image—as if the unity of all it has to say must be simultaneously understood at both small and large scales of observation. To stress this unity, I wanted the story to move swiftly, so that the full sweep of it could be held in mind as clearly as in the miniature composition, *Das Leben*, that precedes it. To achieve this, I used a quick pace, thematic relationship between parts, and almost complete absence of repetition. Perhaps one more mass added to thousands is insignificant, but I offer this final “annunciation” to raise a question:

What comparable new forms of interpretation, appropriate to our lives, can be created to unify the work and worship of the community? My personal answer to the question is found in the remaining four parts of the **Marginal Notes** project, but other, stronger answers are needed—honest representations that unify worship and practice of the divine life in our times, as the Mass did for past times.

Kyrie

Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison.	Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.
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Gloria

**Gloria in excelsis deo, et in terra pax
hominibus bonae voluntatis.
laudamus te, Benedicimus te, Adoramus
te, Glorificamus te
gratias agimus tibi propter magnam
gloriam tuam, Domine Deus, Rex
coelestis, Pater omnipotens, Domine
unigenite, Jesu Christe, Domine Deus
agnus Dei, filius Patris, Qui tollis
peccata mundi, misere nobis**

**Suscipe deprecationem nostrum
qui sedes ad dexteram Patris,
misere nobis, Quoniam tu solus
sanctus, tu solus Dominus, tu
solus altissimus, Jesu Christe, cum
sancto spiritu in gloria Dei Patris
Amen.**

Credo

**Credo in unum Deum, Patrem
omnipotentem, factorem coeli et
et terrae, visibilium omnium et
invisibilium. Et in unum Dominum
Jesum Christum, Filium Dei
et ex Patre natum, ante omnia
saecula, Deum de Deo, lumen de
Deum verum de Deo vero
genitum non factum, con substantialem
Patri, per quem omnia facta sunt.**

**Qui propter nos homines, et propter
salutem descendit de coelis, Et
incarnates est de spiritu sancto
ex Maria Virgine et homo factus est,
crucifixus etiam pro nobis sub
Pontio Pilato, passus et sepultus est
Et resurrexit tertia die, secundum
scripturas, et ascendit in coelum**

**sedet ad dexteram Patris, et iterum
et iterum venturus est cum gloria
judicare vivos et mortuos, cujus
regni non erit finis. Et in spiritum
sanctum, Dominum et vivificantem,**

Glory to God in the highest, and on
Earth, peace to men of good will..

We praise you, we bless you,
we adore you, we glorify you.
We thank you for your great
glory, Lord God, heavenly king
almighty Father, Lord, the only-
begotten Son, Jesus Christ, Lord God
Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
who takes away the sins of the world
Have mercy upon us,
Receive our prayer, Who sits on
the right hand of Father,
Have mercy upon us, For you only
are holy, you only are Lord, you
only are most high, Jesus Christ with
the Holy Spirit in the glory of the
Father. Amen.

I believe in one God, Father
almighty, maker of heaven and earth,
and of all things visible and invisible
And in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the
only begotten son of God,
and born of the Father, before all
ages, God of God, light of light,
very God of very God,
begotten, not made, of one sub-
stance with the Father, by whom all t
things were made.

Who, for us men, and for our
salvation, came down from heaven &
became incarnate by the Holy Spirit
of the Virgin Mary and was made
and was crucified also for us under
Pontius Pilate, suffered and was
buried, and the third day he rose
again according to the scriptures, &
ascended into heaven
and sitteth on the right hand of the
Father, and he shall come again with
glory to judge the living and the dead
whose kingdom shall have no end.
and in the Holy Spirit, the lord and

**qui ex Patre Filioque procedit
qui cum Patre et Filio simul
adoratur et conglorificatur,
qui locutus est per prophetas, et
unam sanctam catholicam et
apostolicam ecclesiam, Confiteor
in remissionem peccatorum,
et expecto resurrectionem
mortuorum, et vitam venturi
saeculi, Amen.**

life-giver, who proceeds from Father
and Son, who with the Father and
Son, together, is glorified, who spoke
by the prophets, and
in one holy catholic and apostolic
church, I acknowledge one baptism
for the remission of sins, And I
expect the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come.
Amen.

Sanctus et Benedictus

**Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus
Dominus Deus Sabaoth
pleni sunt coeli et terra
gloria tua**

Holy, holy, holy
Lord god of hosts,
Heaven and earth are full
of your glory.

**Benedictus qui venit
in nomine Domini
Osanna in excelsis.**

Blessed is he who comes
in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.

Agnus Dei

**Agnus Dei
qui tollis peccata mundi,
misere nobis,
dona nobis pacem.**

Lamb of God,
who takes away the sins of the world
have mercy upon us,
give us peace.

Amen.