

A reflection for the Feast of the Annunciation

I doubt Mary felt anything physically when she agreed to the Archangel's request that she bear the Son of God. I know some people who have been trying for children say they knew immediately when they were successful, but generally the moment of conception is a silent, hidden, unfelt thing.

Mary has this almost unbelievable encounter with Gabriel and then he departs and she is on her own. Did it really happen? Was she imagining or dreaming it? Will it come true? The angel has told her that her cousin Elizabeth, assumed by all to be beyond child-bearing, is pregnant, so Mary goes – presumably in part to see if it's true and she wasn't kidding herself.

The conception of Our Lord, the great dawn of our salvation, happens in silence, unfelt, hidden. Mary is not sure.

It takes no leap of the imagination to see how this feast is relevant to us all amid the horrors of COVID-19 and lockdown. We are forced to pray alone or just with family; we do not know when it will end; and we might be forgiven for wondering if we're up to relying on our own resources of prayer and faith. It might not feel right doing all this at home rather than in Little Saint Mary's.

Yet the Annunciation – one of the greatest moments in the history of the cosmos – happened much like this: in a home, amid uncertainty, nothing obviously felt or proved. Being under Roman occupation was not a lot better than our present existences confined in our homes while this confounding illness is brought to heel. At least our predicament will end.

Mary rushes off to see her cousin. We cannot go and visit our brothers and sisters in faith at the moment, but we can email and telephone them and we can be assured in a way Mary and Elizabeth couldn't yet, that we are one in Christ, one in the communion of the saints and that however poor we fear our prayers are, they are united and supported by Christians of every time and place. Let's be sure to keep in touch and to pray even on the telephone.

And then begins the long wait – the wait for the physical change in Mary, for the Lord's birth and so for rejoicing. May Our Lady pray for us all that we may be patient and wait for the good news that the virus is gone and we can emerge, rejoicing, new-born into the world, with Jesus Christ!