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An exegetical study of the annunciation of Luke 1:26-38 through text and art

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## **Chapter I: Introduction**

The true beginning of the New Testament<sup>1</sup> is the affirmative reply of Mary of Nazareth, a young Jewish girl, to God's messenger, the archangel Gabriel and her conception by the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:26-38) of the long-prophesied Messiah." In presenting the event of the Annunciation, Luke the evangelist communicates the announcement of the Incarnation of the promised Messiah to the audience of his time. The narrative is reflected in many artworks, but four have been chosen for this study: two from the sixteenth century and two from the twentieth century. Each artwork captures a single moment of the Annunciation event and each of the artworks was also conditioned by their historical circumstances.

### **Research Purpose**

This research hopes to examine and consider what has been communicated or forgone by the choices made by either the Lukan author or artist in their portrayal of the historical event of the Incarnation. Both the text of the Annunciation to Mary by the Archangel Gabriel in Luke 1:26-38 and its depiction in four artworks, were created for different purposes and from different epochs in history. The Lukan author and the artists were all communicating the same event of the Incarnation of the promised Messiah to different audiences at different times. Both the Lukan author and the artists had their own understanding of this historical event. By examining and considering the selected pericope and artworks, it is hoped that a perspective of the interplay between text and artworks communicating the Annunciation event will emerge.

### **Elaboration of Research Task**

The purpose of this research is to discover if the understanding of the Annunciation has evolved over time; or has there been junction or disjunction between the articulated theology of the Church of each period being examined (namely: from first century Christianity, Early Renaissance and late twentieth century) and the resultant theology presented in the artworks.

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Benedict XVI and Philip Whitmore, *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives*, vol. 3, Jesus of Nazareth Trilogy (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 26; also see for the prophecies relating to the promised messiah: Deut 18:18-20, Isa 7:14, Dan 7:13-14.

Listed below is the chosen pericope Luke 1:26-38 in both the Koine Greek version from the Apparatus for the Greek New Testament: SBL Edition and the English version from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).<sup>2</sup>

Table 1:1 - English Translation of Luke 1:26-38 in Koine Greek

Luke 1:26-38 - Koine Greek	Luke 1:26-38 (NRSV)
<sup>26</sup> Ἐν δὲ τῷ μηνὶ τῷ ἕκτῳ ἀπεστάλη ὁ ἄγγελος Γαβριὴλ ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ εἰς πόλιν τῆς Γαλιλαίας ἣ ὄνομα Ναζαρέτ	<sup>26</sup> In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth,
<sup>27</sup> πρὸς παρθένον ἐμνηστευμένην ἀνδρὶ ᾧ ὄνομα Ἰωσήφ ἐξ οἴκου Δαυίδ, καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τῆς παρθένου Μαριάμ.	<sup>27</sup> to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.
<sup>28</sup> καὶ εἰσελθὼν πρὸς αὐτὴν εἶπεν Χαῖρε, κεχαριτωμένη ὁ κύριος μετὰ σοῦ	<sup>28</sup> And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you."
<sup>29</sup> ἡ δὲ ἐπὶ τῷ λόγῳ διεταράχθη καὶ διελογίζετο ποταπὸς εἶη ὁ ἀσπασμὸς οὗτος.	<sup>29</sup> But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.
<sup>30</sup> καὶ ἰδοὺ συλλήμψῃ ἐν γαστρὶ καὶ τέξῃ υἱόν	<sup>30</sup> The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God.
<sup>31</sup> καὶ καλέσεις τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦν.	<sup>31</sup> And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.
<sup>32</sup> οὗτος ἔσται μέγας καὶ υἱὸς Ὑψίστου κληθήσεται, καὶ δώσει αὐτῷ Κύριος ὁ θεὸς τὸν θρόνον Δαυίδ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ	<sup>32</sup> He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David.

<sup>2</sup> Greek New Testament: SBL Edition (Atlanta, Georgia: The Society of Biblical Literature; also available at Logos Bible Software, 2010), <https://biblia.com/books/sblgnt/Lk1.26>. electronic resource.

Luke 1:26-38 - Koine Greek	Luke 1:26-38 (NRSV)
<sup>33</sup> καὶ βασιλεύσει ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον Ἰακώβ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, καὶ τῆς βασιλείας αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἔσται τέλος.	<sup>33</sup> He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”
<sup>34</sup> εἶπεν δὲ Μαριάμ πρὸς τὸν ἄγγελον Πῶς ἔσται τοῦτο, ἐπεὶ ἄνδρα οὐ γινώσκω	<sup>34</sup> Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?”
<sup>35</sup> καὶ ἀποκριθεὶς ὁ ἄγγελος εἶπεν αὐτῇ Πνεῦμα ἅγιον ἐπελεύσεται ἐπὶ σέ καὶ δύναμις Ὑψίστου ἐπισκιάσει σοι· διὸ καὶ τὸ γεννώμενον ἅγιον κληθήσεται υἱὸς θεοῦ·	<sup>35</sup> The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.
<sup>36</sup> καὶ ἰδοὺ Ἐλεῖσάβητ ἡ συγγενὴς σου καὶ αὐτὴ συνείληφεν υἱὸν ἐν γήρει αὐτῆς, καὶ οὗτος μὴν ἕκτος ἐστὶν αὐτῇ τῇ καλουμένην στειρᾶ·	<sup>36</sup> And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren.
<sup>37</sup> ὅτι οὐκ ἀδυνατήσῃ παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ πᾶν ῥῆμα.	<sup>37</sup> For nothing will be impossible with God.”
<sup>38</sup> εἶπεν δὲ Μαριάμ Ἴδου ἡ δούλη Κυρίου· γένοιτό μοι κατὰ τὸ ῥῆμά σου. καὶ ἀπῆλθεν ἀπ’ αὐτῆς ὁ ἄγγελος.	<sup>38</sup> Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

The following table lists the artworks being examined as part of this research.

Table 1:2 - List of Selected Artworks

Artwork 1	(c. 1505–1510). “ <i>Rothschild Prayer Book, Fols 84v-85r: The Annunciation. Matins, Hours of the Virgin</i> ” Ghent and Bruges
Artwork 2	“ <i>The Madonna Annunciate; The Angel Gabriel</i> ” - (c. 15th/16th) by Falcó, Nicolás.
Artwork 3	“ <i>Ante Lucem</i> ” ( <i>Before the Light</i> ) – 1990 by John Paul
Artwork 4	“ <i>Triptych of the Annunciation</i> ” – 1990 by Alan Oldfield