

TOWNELEY CYCLE, Toronto 1985

Play IX: THE ANNUNCIATION AND THE SALUTATION

Modernized text by David Parry

CAST

God

Gabriel

Mary

Joseph

Elizabeth

This play in the Toronto production is comprised of Towneley X and XI from the EETS edition: Annunciatio and Salutatio Elezabeth (pp. 86-100). The break may clearly be seen in the present version after l.373.

Aside from some minor ambiguities of meaning in the original, which I have dealt with as carefully as I can, there are two other textual problems of some consequence, both resulting from the amalgamation of the plays. The first is the shift in action between the end of the Annunciation and the beginning of the Salutation. However, the fact that Joseph turns to the audience at l.365, and speaks the remaining 9 lines of the play to them directly, gives an opportunity in the context of the present production to move him off the scaffold which he and Mary have been occupying, and into the "place" to deliver his lines. From there, a move out of the place as he concludes would be fairly natural. Focus as he moves off might then be redirected to Mary by music at her scaffold, and the music could continue until she has completed her move to Elizabeth's location.

The second textual problem exists independently of the amalgamation, but is much more noticeable when the plays are combined as they have been here. The quality of the poetry is considerably lower in the Visitation than in the Annunciation. I have not tried to disguise this in any way. However, in this particular case the awkward shift in style may perhaps be turned to advantage. After the break in the action at l.373, an emphasis on the "chattiness" of the initial encounter between Mary and Elizabeth might help divert the audience's attention from the fact that it is also written in rather rough verse until the play is well under way -- by which point the transition has been accomplished.

It would be well worth looking at the Vulgate (or Douay/Rheims) version of the Magnificat when working through the text of the last portion of the play. Some of the meaning is rather different from the King James version -- and not a mistake on the part of the original writer, or mine as modernizer.

Finally, I have kept the somewhat random mix of terms of address in the original -- "thee", "ye", "you", "thou". It seems to be part of the flavour, and I suggest you don't try and iron out all the differences for the sake of consistency.

GOD:            Since I have made all things of nought,  
                  And Adam with my hand have wrought  
                  Like to mine image, at my device,  
                  And given him joy in Paradise,  
                  Intending him to dwell therein --                     5  
                  Until against me he did sin --  
                  Then I put him out of that place;  
                  But promise I gave him then of grace:  
                  The oil of mercy for his sake,  
                  And time also his sorrow to slake.                     10  
                  For he has bought his sin full sore,  
                  All these five thousand years and more,  
                  First in earth, and then in hell.  
                  But long therein he shall not dwell:  
                  Out of pain he shall be bought;                     15  
                  I will not lose that I have wrought.  
                  I will make redemption,  
                  As I promised, in my own person  
                  All with reason and with right,  
                  Both through mercy and through might.                     20  
                  He shall not ever be damned, therefore,  
                  For wronged he was, with guileful lore.  
                  He shall out of prison pass,  
                  Since he was beguiled, alas,  
                  Through the adder and his wife --                     25  
                  They made him touch the tree of life,  
                  And eat the fruit that I forbid --  
                  And he was damned for what he did,  
                  Restitution will we make.  
                  I will that my son manhood take,                     30  
                  For reason tells there should be three:  
                  A man; a maiden; and a tree --  
                  Man for man; tree for tree;  
                  Maiden for maiden; thus shall it be.  
                  My son shall in a maiden light,                     35

Against the fiend of hell to fight,  
 Without a mark, as sun through glass,  
 And she still maiden as she was.  
 Both God and man shall he be,  
 And she a mother and maiden free. 40  
 To Abraham I promise made,  
 To save himself and all his seed;  
 And I will that all prophecy  
 Shall fulfilled be here by me.  
 For I am Lord that all shall heal; 45  
 My prophets words shall never fail.  
 What Moses spoke, and Isaiah,  
 King David too, and Jeremiah,  
 Habbakkuk and Daniel,  
 Sibyl, that truth would ever tell, 50  
 And mine other prophets all:  
 As they have said, it shall befall.

Rise up, Gabriel, and go  
 Unto a maiden pure as snow,  
 To Nazareth, in Galilee:-- 55  
 There she dwells, in that city --  
 To that virgin, and to that spouse,  
 To a man of David's house.  
 Joseph, the name he is known by,  
 And the maiden's name, Mary. 60  
 Angel, thou must to Mary go  
 Because the fiend to Eve was foe.  
 He was foul, of loathly sight,  
 And thou art angel, fair and bright.  
 And hail that maiden, loved of me, 65  
 With all thy kindly courtesy.  
 In my behalf thou shall her greet:  
 I have her chosen, that maiden sweet;  
 She shall conceive my darling  
 Through thy word, and her hearing. 70

I will alight in her body  
That cleanly is prepared for me.  
She shall of her body bear  
God and man, with no harm there;  
She shall be blessed, without an end. 75  
Prepare thee, Gabriel, and wend.

GABRIEL: Hail, Mary, gracious!  
Hail, maiden, and God's own spouse!  
Unto thee I bow.  
Of all virgins thou art queen, 80  
That ever was, or shall be seen,  
I truly vow.

Hail, Mary, and well thou be!  
My Lord of heaven is with thee  
Without an end. 85  
Hail, thou, of merit the fountainhead:  
Goodly lady, have thou no dread  
Of that I command.

For thou has found, thyself alone,  
Such grace of God as was not known 90  
Since Adam's plight.  
This is the grace that thee betides:  
Thou shalt conceive within thy sides  
A child of might.

When he is come, this one, thy son, 95  
He shall take circumcision.  
Call him Jhesum.  
A mighty man shall he be famed,  
And God's own son shall he be named  
That day shall come. 100

My Lord also, to him alone  
Shall give his father, David's, throne,  
Therein to sit.  
He shall be king in Jacob's line;  
His kingdom never shall decline, 105  
Lady, well know thou it.

MARY: What is thy name?

GABRIEL: Gabriel:  
God's strength, and his angel,  
That comes to thee.

MARY: Truly, thou greet me wondrously: 110  
A child to bear thou promise me.  
How should it be?

I came never to man's bed:  
From fleshly getting, my maidenhead  
Vowed to keep pure. 115  
Therefore I know not how  
This should be broken as a vow  
That I made sure.

Nevertheless, well do I know  
To work thy word, and keep thy vow 120  
God is all-mighty.  
But yet I know not of what manner;  
Therefore I pray thee, messenger,  
That thou teach me.

GABRIEL: Lady, thus then secretly:  
The Holy Ghost shall light in thee,  
And his virtue.  
He shall protect thee, and fulfil,  
That thy maidenhead shall never spill --  
Be ever new! 130

The child that thou shall bear, my dame,  
Shall God's own son be called, by name.  
And see, Mary:  
Elizabeth thy cousin, that barren is known,  
In old age has conceived a son, 135  
Of Zachary.

This is, for whoso ask of thee,  
The sixth month of her pregnancy,  
That barren was called.  
No word, lady, that † thee bring, 140  
Is impossible to heaven's king,  
But all shall hold.

MARY: I love my Lord, ruler of all;  
I am his handmaid at his call:  
He shall me hold. 145  
I trust the tidings that thou bring  
Shall be done to me in each thing  
That thou has told.

GABRIEL: Maiden fair, I end;  
My way now must I wend: 150  
My leave of thee I take.

MARY: Fare to my friend,  
Who thee can send  
For mankind's sake

JOSEPH: Almighty God, what may this be? 155  
Mary, my wife, so confounds me:  
Alas, what has she wrought?  
Ah, her body is great, and she with child --  
Yet by me never was defiled:  
Therefore mine is it not. 160

I am ill-content with life  
That ever I wed so young a wife:  
I curse that bargain so!  
To me it was a sorry deed;  
I should have know that youth, indeed, 165  
Would wish with man to go.

I am old, the truth to say,  
Passed am I this lovers' play:  
These games from me are gone!  
It is ill-coupled, age and youth: 170  
Since I cannot, now she in truth  
Has taken some other one.

She is with child, I know not how:  
Oh, who would trust a woman now?  
Surely, all men are beguiled. 175  
I know not in the world what I should do.  
But now, then, will I go her to,  
And know who sired that child.

Hail, Mary, and well be ye!  
Why, but woman, what cheer with thee? 180

MARY: The better, sir, for you.

JOSEPH: So would I, woman, ye were that way!  
But truly, Mary, I rue the day  
That it stands so with thee now.  
But of one thing question I shall: 185  
Whose is this child you bear withal?

MARY: Sir, yours, and God's on high.

JOSEPH: Mine, Mary? Now stop your din!  
That I should have part therein  
To tell you need not try. 190

Wherefore, then, should ye this say?  
I never came to thee this way:  
How should it then be mine?  
Whose is this child, God give you bliss?

MARY: Sir, God's and yours, truly it is. 195

JOSEPH: That word you should resign!  
For it was not within my power;  
And your ill deeds in lover's bower  
I bitterly regret.  
And if thou speak thyself to spill, 200  
It is sorely against my will,  
If thou might have mended it.

MARY: At God's will, Joseph, must it be;  
For certainly, save God and ye,  
I know no other man: 205  
With flesh I never was defiled.

JOSEPH: How should you thus, then, be with child? --  
Excuse thee well thou can!

I blame thee not, so God me save,  
If womens' waywardness ye have, 210  
But truly, I tell thee this:  
We'll ye know, and so do I,  
Thy body shames thee openly  
Of what thou'st done amiss.

MARY: Yea, God he knows all my doing. 215



JOSEPH:           Why, now, this is a fearful thing:  
                  Nothing can I reply;  
                  But yet my heart with grief is sore,  
                  And every hour more and more --  
                  For tears what may I try?                                 220

                  God's and mine she says it is.  
                  I will not father it -- she says amiss!  
                  And lest she think to get  
                  Safety from censure now with me,  
                  With her will I no longer be:                                 225  
                  I rue that ever we met.

                  And how we met, you soon shall know:  
                  The custom is each child shall go  
                  To the Temple, to be taught;  
                  So did they her, till she grew more                                 230  
                  Than other maidens wise of lore.  
                  Then bishops for her sought.

                  And said, "Now Mary, you must take  
                  Some young man, thy mate to make,  
                  As others have, the Temple within.                                 235  
                  The choice is thine: whom shall it be?  
                  "Why, none but God of heaven," said she --  
                  She had given herself to him,

                  And to none other; they were nonplussed.  
                  It was the law, they said: she must,                                 240  
                  For to that age she did draw  
                  To the Temple they summoned old and young --  
                  All that were from Judah sprung --  
                  Thus to fulfil the law.

                  They gave then each man a white wand,                                 245  
                  And bade us bear them in our hand,  
                  To offer with good intent.

Their wands to offer, then made they bold,  
I stood beside, for I was old,  
And knew not what they meant. 250

They lacked but one, they did they cry:  
All had offered, they said, but I,  
For always I withdrew me.  
Forth with my wand they made me come,  
And in my hand it burst in bloom! 255  
Then said they all to me:

"Marvel thee not, old though thou be,  
For God ordains it openly:  
Thy wand shows this most plain.  
It flourishes so," to me they said, 260  
"That maiden Mary thou shouldst wed." --  
I was a sorry swain!

Then was I in a sorry plight.  
Because of age, I said, I might  
Not have her, come what may; 265  
For one so young I was unfit --  
They said there was no help for it,  
And wed us there that day.

And when I thus had wed her there,  
We and four maidens home did fare -- 270  
The daughters of the king.  
They made silk garments to put on.  
Mary made purple; the others none  
But other colours would bring.

In peace, I thought, I left them there; 275  
Fast to the country I did fare,  
My craft to practise plain.  
To earn a living I had need;  
To Mary I prayed them take good heed,

Until I came again 280

For nine months left I Mary mild:  
When I came home, she was with child.  
"For shame," I said, "my spouse!"  
I asked the women who had this done,  
And they told me an angel, soon 285  
After I left the house:

"An angel spoke with that maid bright,  
And no man else, by day nor night;  
It is as we have told."  
Thus they excused her, truly, 290  
Fairly to free her of her folly,  
And mocked me, that was old.

Would an angel this deed have wrought?  
Such excuses help her not,  
Be they clever as they can. 295  
A heavenly thing, forsooth, is he,  
And she is earthly; this may not be --  
It is some other man!

I am sorry for her deed, in truth;  
But it is on account of youth, 300  
All this wanton play.  
For young women needs must play them  
With young men, if the old forsake 'em --  
We see it every day.

But Mary and I played never thus; 305  
That game was never used by us:  
I came her never so near.

As cloven crystal she is clean  
To me, while I one earth remain:

The law decrees it so. 310  
 Am I the cause, then, of her deed.  
 Therefore? -- Of counsel have I need:  
 Alas, what wretched woe!

And truly, if it so befall  
 God's son it is she bears withal -- 315  
 If such grace should betide --  
 I know well that I am not he  
 That fit and worthy is to be  
 That blessed body beside,

Nor yet to keep her company. 320  
 To the wilderness, then, for me,  
 Upon my weary feet;  
 And no more with her will I deal,  
 But softly from her shall I steal,  
 That no more shall we meet. 325

ANGEL: Oh stay, Joseph, and mend thy thought,  
 I warn thee well; and wend thee not  
 To the wilderness so wild.  
 Turn home to thy spouse again;  
 For no deceit in her find blame: 330  
 She never was defiled.

Of no misdeeds blame not, nor boast.  
 She has conceived the Holy Ghost,  
 And she shall bear God's son.  
 Therefore with her, in thy degree, 335  
 Meek and obedient look thou be,  
 And dwell with her as one.

JOSEPH: Ah, Lord, I love thee all alone,  
 That does vouchsafe I be the one  
 To tend that tiny child: 340

I, that ungraciously have gone,  
And wrongfully cast blame upon  
Mary, that maid so mild.

Keenly I curse those unkind names:  
The gall I gave her for her games --  
And she unguilty is!  
Therefore to her will I wend,  
And pray her now to be my friend,  
And ask her forgiveness.

345

Ah Mary, wife: what cheer?

350

MARY: The better, sir, that ye are here.  
Thus long where wandered you?

JOSEPH: Truly, walked about like a fool  
That has forsaken right and rule --  
I knew not what I'd do!

355

My love so true, I know this now:  
That I have sinned, 'gainst God and thou.  
Forgive me, I thee pray.

MARY: Now all that ever ye said to me,  
God forgive, as I, freely,  
With all the might I may.

360

JOSEPH: God bless now, Mary, thy good will,  
That thus forgives what I said ill,  
When I did thee upbraid.  
With such a mate, now well is he  
Has wife so meek -- though poor he be,  
He is a lucky man!

365

Light as a leaf now is my mind!  
 He that may both loose and bind,  
 And every misdeed mend, 370  
 Lend me grace, power, and might,  
 My wife and her son so sweet  
 To keep, to my life's end.

Here ends the Annunciation to the blessed Mary

Here begins the Salutation of Elizabeth

MARY: My Lord of heaven, that sits on high,  
 All things beholding with his eye, 375  
 Thee save, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH: Welcome, Mary, blessed bloom,  
 Joyful am I thou hast come  
 To me from Nazareth.

MARY: How stands it with you, dame? Now tell. 380

ELIZABETH: Daughter and dear heart, I am well  
 As can be, though now old.

MARY: Long have I wished to speak with thee,  
 For in old age with child ye be --  
 And "barren" were ye called. 385

ELIZABETH: Oh, long shall I the better be,  
 To speak my fill now, here with thee,  
 My own dear kinswoman:  
 To know how thy friends fare, 390  
 In thy country, here and there.  
 Now, tell me all thou can --  
 And how thou fare, my sweeting.

MARY: Well, dame -- and bless your asking.  
You wish us well, I know.

ELIZABETH: Is Joachim, thy father, in peace? 395  
And Anna, thy mother, my niece?  
How stands it with them now?

MARY: Dame, still they enjoy this life:  
Both Joachim and Anna his wife.

ELIZABETH: And else were my heart sore! 400

MARY: Dame, God that all can do  
Keep these your words true,  
And bless you therefore.

ELIZABETH: Blessed of all women be thou, 405  
And the fruit that lies, I vow,  
Within the womb of thee;  
And this hour may I bless  
That my Lord's mother is  
Come thus unto me.

For that same moment that I knew, 410  
And this angelic voice rang true  
And sounded in mine ear,  
A wondrous thing in me occurred:  
The child makes joy now, like a bird,  
That in my body I bear 415

Ah, Mary, Mary! blessed are you,  
That steadfastly believed them true --  
The words of heaven's king.  
Therefore to all shall now appear  
Those things that to thee were made clear 420  
By the angel's greeting.

MARY: Magnificat anima mea dominum:  
My soul loveth my Lord above;  
My spirit rejoices now, with love,  
In God, my healing balm. 425  
For he beheld with grace  
His handmaid's lowliness,  
And kept me from all harm.

Lo, what shall then to me betide:  
All nations, now, on every side 430  
Blessed shall me call.  
Since he that great and mighty is  
Moves in me now that might, all his,  
Blessed be his name over all!

And his mercy also flows  
Through generations, to all those  
That dread him in their mind.  
Might in his arms he wrought,  
And destroyed in his thought  
Proud men of every kind. 440

Mighty men from from their seats he did  
Put down, and raised up in their stead  
All those meek of heart.  
The hungry with food he satisfied,  
And the rich he left outside, 445  
From joy to depart.

Israel he has, by his vow,  
His own son thus given now,  
By means of his mercy --  
As he told before 450  
To our father, Abraham,  
And to his progeny.



Elizabeth, mine aunt so dear,  
My leave I take of you here,  
For now too long I stay. 455

ELIZABETH: Will thou go now, God's own child?  
Come -- kiss me daughter, meek and mild,  
Ere thou away.  
Thou noble maiden, farewell now.  
Of comfort good, I pray, be thou, 460  
For thou art full of grace.  
Greet well our folk of kin,  
And the Lord that gave thee grace within  
Save all here in this place!

Here ends the Salutation of Elizabeth