

# Annunciation – A Poem by Denise Levertov

*We know the scene:*

*the room, variously furnished, almost always a lectern, a book, always the tall lily.  
Arrived on solemn grandeur of great wings, the angelic ambassador,  
standing or hovering, whom she acknowledges, a guest.*

*But we are told of meek obedience. No one mentions courage.*

*The engendering Spirit did not enter her without consent.*

*God waited.*

*She was free to accept or to refuse, choice integral to humanness.*

*Aren't there annunciations of one sort or another in most lives?*

*Some unwillingly undertake great destinies,  
enact them in sullen pride, uncomprehending.*

*More often those moments when roads of light and storm  
open from darkness in a man or woman,  
are turned away from in dread, in a wave of weakness, in despair and with relief.*

*Ordinary lives continue. God does not smite them.*

*But the gates close, the pathway vanishes.*

*She had been a child who played, ate, slept like any other child - but unlike others,  
wept only for pity, laughed in joy not triumph.  
Compassion and intelligence fused in her, indivisible.*

*Called to a destiny more momentous than any in all of Time, she did not quail,  
only asked a simple, 'How can this be?' and gravely, courteously,  
took to heart the angel's reply, the astounding ministry she was offered:*

*to bear in her womb Infinite weight and lightness;  
to carry in hidden, finite inwardness,  
nine months of Eternity; to contain in slender vase of being,  
the sum of power - in narrow flesh, the sum of light.*

*Then bring to birth, push out into air, a Man-child needing,  
like any other, milk and love –*

*but who was God.*

*This was the moment no one speaks of,  
when she could still refuse.*

*A breath unbreathed, Spirit, suspended, waiting.*

*She did not cry, 'I cannot. I am not worthy,'  
nor, 'I have not the strength.'*

*She did not submit with gritted teeth, raging, coerced.*

*Bravest of all humans, consent illumined her.  
The room filled with its light, the lily glowed in it, and the iridescent wings.*

*Consent, courage unparalleled, opened her utterly.*

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Born to an English mother and Russian Hasidic Jewish father. Her father became an Anglican priest.

*"My father's Hasidic ancestry, his being steeped in Jewish and Christian scholarship and mysticism, his fervour and eloquence as a preacher, were factors built into my cells".*