



## The Annunciation

This icon, featured as our exhibition image, came from St. Catherine's Monastery in the Sinai through Princeton University where specific digitized images were made available to the Classical Iconography Institute.

This version of the Annunciation is unique because of the nearly transparent image of the neonatal Christ imprinted on Mary's heart, indicating that the incarnation took place by assent in Mary's heart first. This is an important theological distinction, because it tells us that God didn't force his way into human history when Jesus was born. Instead, he gave us free will and chose to work *with* people, respecting both his own authority and our freedom to choose. God's incredible love and help are there for us, but we need to say "yes".

I chose this icon for its golden tones, intricate scenery, and strong focus on emotion. After careful consideration, I decided to paint in the golden background, rather than use gold leaf. By doing this, I hoped to emphasize the shimmering medallion surrounding the dove, and the ray of light descending on the Virgin Mary.

I tried to subdue the background so that the focus remains Mary, appearing apprehensive as she watches the angel approach her throne. In her left hand she holds the red thread used to weave the temple veil. The infant Christ is barely visible, seen within in a pale mandorla on Mary's upper body. The angel Gabriel, attired in flowing gold robes, has a troubled appearance, as if anticipating Mary's sorrows.

Around them, the scenery teems with abundant spring imagery: a river flowing before them, filled with fish, birds throughout the scene, including a pair of storks nesting on the rooftop, a symbol of Spring and the renewal of life.

I invite you to take a moment to immerse yourself in this simple, yet complex scene and discover what appears meaningful to you.

*Laurie Muench, Iconographer*