



VIDEO TRANSCRIPTION

1 | Announcement of the Birth of John (Luke 1:5-25)



ENCOUNTER
BEAUTY

Commentary on Andrea Miglionico's "Annunciation to Zacharias" by
Dr. Elizabeth Lev | ART HISTORIAN

The Annunciation to Zacharias is one of several altarpieces painted by under Andrea Miglionico for the church of Saint Michael near Naples, Italy. This work, painted around 1700, shows the priest, Zechariah, who was chosen to bring incense to the altar in the temple. There, he encounters the Angel Gabriel who tells him that his wife, Elizabeth, descendant of the daughters of Aaron, will bear him a child: John the Baptist. Zacharias, shocked, asks, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years." For this disbelief, he will be struck dumb until the birth of his son.

The artist chose to capture the most exciting moment: the arrival of the angel Gabriel with this good news to the old man; and, we see the angel in the midst of speaking to the surprised priest. Miglionico, who was born in Matera Emporia, studied under the famous Neapolitan painter, Luca Giordano. In this painting, he takes us into the inner sanctuary of the temple, where Zacharias and the angel are alone, while the others pray outside. We see the incense laid on the ground, with a few wispy fumes to give us the impression of the immediacy of the moment. The room is made of dark stone; broad, slate blocks make up the steps leading to the oblong slab of the altar, placed inside the cavernous curve of the apse. But in the midst of this somber, tomb-like space, the angel and Zacharias appear as an explosion of color. The angel perches on a billowy cloud, leaning back comfortably as he gestures towards Zacharias. His luminous golden, white tunic is ignited by a splash of red. Zacharias, on the other hand, wears an outfit that recalls the elaborate ceremonial costume prepared for Aaron in Exodus 39. In particular, we see the breastplate made of gold and decorated with inlaid jewels. The Bible describes the headdress of the high priest as well as his robes, and Miglionico adds his own personal interpretation of the golden ephod (the cloak) and changes the color of Zacharias' robe to green; the color traditionally used in depictions of Aaron's brother, Moses; but mostly a color of hope.

Miglionico specialized in paintings of apparitions; revealing how the supernatural erupted into the natural world. As a Rococo painter, he liked to paint the ease with which the divine or heavenly figures come to illuminate our darkness, lending an exuberantly joyful note to his work.



Annunciation to Saint Zacharias by the Archangel Gabriel of the Birth of His Son John the Baptist / Andrea Miglionico / Photo © Tarker / Bridgeman Images



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