

HYMN PERFORMANCE

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An Advent Hymn: "To a Maid Engaged to Joseph"

The Annunciation, as recorded in Luke 1:26-38, relates an extraordinary encounter between a young woman and a divine messenger. When read as scripture in corporate worship, this passage invites a dramatic reading involving three characters or voices: a narrator, Mary, and Gabriel. These three characters share in presenting the scripture divided as dialogue and narration. Hymn settings of the Annunciation also invite similar treatment.

Several current hymnals include paraphrases of the Annunciation. A nineteenth-century paraphrase, "The Angel Gabriel from Heaven Came," is set to a traditional Basque carol and is included in *The Hymnal 1982, Hymnal: A Worship Book* (1992) and *The Presbyterian Hymnal* (1990). My congregation enjoys singing "To a Maid Engaged to Joseph," a contemporary paraphrase by Gracia Grindal. Her hymn text is set to the tune ANNUNCIATION, composed by Rusty Edwards. This hymn appears in *The Presbyterian Hymnal* (1990) and *The United Methodist Hymnal* (1989).

ANNUNCIATION is an accessible tune for most congregations owing, in part, to a good balance of melodic repetition and contrast. The melodic phrases, organized as AA'B, feature agreeable contours. The tune's narrow range, primarily conjunct motion with small leaps, and strong tonality all contribute to its tunefulness and memorability.

If "To a Maid Engaged to Joseph" is new to your congregation, a meaningful first exposure for them might be a performance of the hymn adapted for singing by three soloists: a narrator, Mary, and Gabriel. As accessible as this hymn tune is, it is helpful for a congregation to hear a new hymn performed before they attempt singing it. This hymn performance could be used alongside, or in lieu of, the scripture reading.

Like scripture divided among multiple readers, a hymn text can be divided among multiple singers. For example, in stanza one the melody can be divided between the narrator and Gabriel. In stanza two, Gabriel continues greetings begun in stanza one. Stanza three, commentary on Mary's reaction, is sung by the narrator. Gabriel sings stanza four, delivering God's commission and promise to Mary. All three voices share in singing stanzas five and six, a conversation between Mary and Gabriel with transitions by the narrator.

Adapting this hymn for performance by a trio adds

timbral interest, especially if both female and male voices are used. Perhaps a child or youth can sing the role of the narrator. Depending on the architecture of the worship space, visual interest can be added by placing Mary and Gabriel together with the narrator distanced from the drama as an observer.

This style of hymn performance requires sufficient rehearsal so that the lines of text and melody flow intelligibly, naturally, and musically. It is helpful for the three characters to mark their scores carefully. A simple accompaniment played on organ, piano, or acoustic guitar is appropriate.

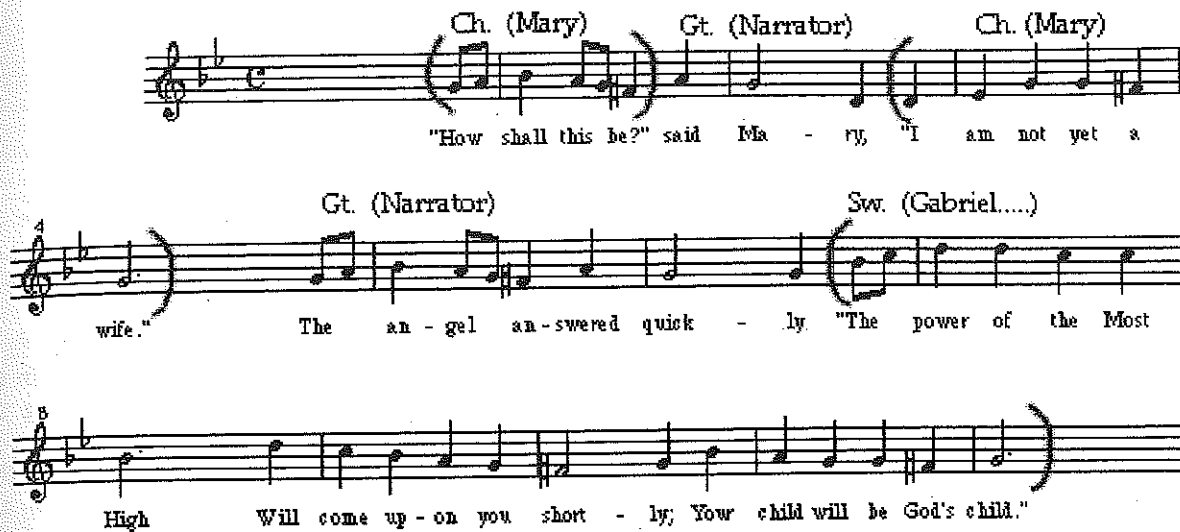
The idea of dividing this text among three voices is possible even while accompanying congregational singing on the organ. Using a three-manual instrument, the organist can highlight the dialogue by judicious selection of stops to "solo out" the characters. Solo stops, such as a cornet for Mary and a solo reed for Gabriel, can be accompanied by a neutral combination of a principal or flute chorus. The chorus does double duty as the narrator's registration. For example, registration on my instrument could be configured as:

Great: Principal 8' or Flutes 8', 4'
Swell: Trompette 8'
Choir: 5-rank Cornet
Pedal: 16', 8' to balance

The Great is both narrator and accompaniment. The Swell is designated for Gabriel while the Choir delivers Mary's dialogue.

For most of the stanzas, this is an easy registration scheme to perform. Stanzas two and four consist of dialogue by Gabriel; thus, the left hand remains on the Great and the right hand solos out the melody on the Swell manual. Likewise, stanza three is narration played entirely on the Great manual. Stanzas one, five and six are more challenging because they involve multiple characters. For example, stanza five features dialogue between Mary and Gabriel with some narration. The score of stanza five illustrates the hymn tune marked with the characters "soloed out."

This style of accompaniment requires careful, thoughtful practice. Beyond the details of marking the score and mastering the manual changes, the organist needs to listen attentively. Listen to the solo registrations so that they support the congregation, contrast enough to differentiate each character and, yet, do not produce a startling or disarming sound with the change of manuals. Listen to the articulation when changing manuals, or characters, so that the final note of a voice does not sound clipped. For example, in stanza five, listen to and experiment with the length of



Ch. (Mary) Gt. (Narrator) Ch. (Mary)

"How shall this be?" said Ma - ry, "I am not yet a

Gt. (Narrator) Sw. (Gabriel....)

wife." The an - gel an - swered quick - ly. "The power of the Most

High Will come up - on you short - ly; Your child will be God's child."

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the notes on "be," "Mary" and "quickly." Again, the goal is for the text and melody to flow intelligibly, naturally, and musically.

Hymn settings of the Annunciation, with its rich dialogue, are ideal texts for performance practices that emphasize and add vitality to the scripture. The techniques presented in this column not only work

well with "To a Maid Engaged to Joseph" but also can be applied to "The Angel Gabriel from Heaven Came."

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Text divided among three singers:

<i>Stanza 1</i>	Narrator: To a maid engaged to Joseph, The Angel Gabriel came. Gabriel: "Fear not," Narrator: the angel told her, Gabriel: "I come to bring good news. Good news I come to tell you, Good news, I say, good news."	<i>Stanza 4</i>	Gabriel: "Fear not, for God is with you, And you shall bear a child. His name shall be called Jesus, God's offspring from on high. And he shall reign forever, Forever reign on high."
<i>Stanza 2</i>	Gabriel: "For you are highly favored By God, the Lord of all, Who even now is with you. You are on earth most blest, You are most blest, most blessed, God chose you, you are blest!"	<i>Stanza 5</i>	Mary: "How shall this be?" Narrator: said Mary, Mary: "I am not yet a wife." Narrator: The angel answered quickly, Gabriel: "The power of the Most High Will come upon you shortly; Your child will be God's child."
<i>Stanza 3</i>	Narrator: But Mary was most troubled To hear the angel's word. What was the angel saying? It troubled her to hear, To hear the angel's message, It troubled her to hear.	<i>Stanza 6</i>	Narrator: As Mary heard the angel, She wondered at his words. Mary: "Behold, I am your handmaid," Narrator: She said unto her God. Mary: "So be it, I am ready According to your Word."