

## *The Annunciation*



*The Annunciation* was painted in 1897 by American artist Henry Ossawa Tanner after a trip to Palestine and Egypt to connect with the culture of the Holy Land. Tanner was the son of an African Methodist Episcopal minister, and his upbringing shines through in his specialization in religious figure painting.

Tanner's painting is quite unique among artistic depictions of the Annunciation. It was typical for earlier artists to render the event in a setting that was aesthetically similar to their own environment with regional architecture. Mary is also normally dressed in rich blue and red drapery and marked by a halo or other holy identifier.

Tanner instead breaks with convention and places the scene within an inner room based on his own observation of architecture in the Holy Land, and he dresses Mary without a halo in clothing much more accurate to the garb of Middle Eastern peasantry. Tanner's choice to ground the piece in such realism gives the figure of Mary an heir of humility and makes her believable in a way that is absent from earlier works.

Tanner makes a second significant departure from artistic convention by choosing to represent the angel Gabriel not as a figure, but as a shaft of fiery light. Notice how Gabriel is the sole source of light in the scene. To me this more theological representation of Gabriel is less like a messenger and more like a conduit channeling the presence and light of God into the room.

