

**Feo Belcari**

**The Representation of the Annunciation to  
Our Lady the Virgin Mary by the Angel  
Gabriel**

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For discussion of this play, and for the Italian text, see Nerida Newbigin, *Feste d'Oltrarno: Plays in Churches in Fifteenth-Century Florence*, 2 vols. (Florence: Olschki, 1996); and also "Greasing the Wheels of Heaven: Recycling, Innovation and the Question of 'Brunelleschi's' Stage Machinery," *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 11 (2007): 201–241.

**Feo Belcari**

**To the magnificent  
Piero di Cosimo de' Medici**

If our forebears maintained temples  
to do such honour to false and empty gods,  
how much more should good Christians do  
for Jesus Christ, the true Lord?

More than others you and your father  
have put your hand to this, with perfect heart.  
More than the Romans you deserve to receive  
the world's praise and God's great love.

Since I see that you have undertaken  
to honour the blessed Virgin Annunciate  
in many ways, as can be seen,

I have taken some time from my waking hours  
and I send you this mystery,  
as the Church celebrates it, recited in verse.

*Deo gratias*

## Characters

THE ANGEL *who speaks the prologue and epilogue*

PROPHETS

ISAIAH

DANIEL

DAVID

SIBYLS

ÆGRIPPAN SIBYL

LIBYAN SIBYL

FRYGIAN SIBYL

SAMIAN SIBYL

ERITREAN SIBYL

DELPHIC SIBYL

PERSIAN SIBYL

HELLESPONTIC SIBYL

THE VIRGIN MARY

ANGELS *or* VIRTUES *in Paradise*

MERCY

PEACE

JUSTICE

TRUTH

GOD THE FATHER

THE SON OF GOD

ANGEL GABRIEL

ADAM *in Limbo*

**Feo Belcari**

**The Representation of the Annunciation  
to Our Lady the Virgin Mary by the Angel Gabriel**

*First an ANGEL announces what is to be done saying:*

1. In the name of immense, eternal God,  
Father and Son and Holy Ghost,  
to whom supreme honour, devout and pious  
be always rendered in word and deed everywhere.  
In his praise and glory I begin  
my words, to draw you under the mantle  
of his perfect love, in such manner and form  
that you follow always in the footsteps of virtue.

2. When the time and the hour approached  
that the eternal Word would take flesh,  
the blessed Angels, without delay,  
all kneeled to beg  
the heavenly Father, worshipped by all,  
saying, "May it please you to free us  
from the sin of Adam, and, and to break down  
the doors of Limbo, and to fill your court.

3. Then Peace and Mercy  
prayed on Man's behalf with sweet reason,  
but Truth and Justice disagreed  
and attacked them for such words.  
Highest Wisdom made peace  
among the Virtues with his incarnation,  
which is the mystery that we want to recite,  
so may it please you to watch in silence.

*AN ANGEL calls the Prophets and the Sibyls by name, and each  
one appears when called, and says what is written below.*

*The Prophet ISAIAH:*

4. Behold the Virgin who will conceive  
and then she will give birth, yet remain a virgin.  
The name of her Son will be  
Emmanuel, which means in translation  
God with us, and he will eat  
milk and honey, so that standing up for what is right  
he knows how to flee evil that is sinful  
and choose good that is virtuous.

*The Prophet DANIEL:*

5. One night I saw in a vision  
and lo, the fair Son of Man came  
and into his jurisdiction was given  
honour and rule, like a noble orb.  
People and languages of every nation  
come serve him as members of his household.  
When the Saint of Saints comes  
the Hebrews Kings will all be gone.

*The Prophet DAVID:*

6. The Lord Father said to my Lord:  
“Sit at my right hand, equal to me in power.”  
My Lord God also swore to me  
this great infallible truth:  
“The fruit of your womb, humble and holy,  
I shall place on my throne in essence.  
My son, who is infinite truth,  
will be born on earth to give life.

*The ÆGRIPPAN SIBYL:*

7. The invisible Word will by touched  
and will germinate as a root.  
It will be dry, like a bitter leaf,  
and it will not appear beautiful and happy.  
The maternal womb will keep it safe,  
and it will be born of woman as a God,  
and then be treated by others as a wicked man.

*The LIBYAN SIBYL:*

8. Behold that day will come soon  
that will enlighten the shuttered shadows,  
and the enigmas and prophecies of the great synagogue  
will be solved, and the lips  
of pious people will be unlocked.  
The King of the Living will be seen, and his limbs  
will be felt with the womb of a true Virgin,  
and by her womb all men will be weighed.

*The FRYGIAN SIBYL:*

9. God will strike the powerful of the earth.  
From highest Heaven the almighty will come to us,  
and he will seal the council without war.  
The Virgin will then receive the annunciation.  
In the deserted valleys it is unlocked.  
This is what I say to you all.

*The SAMIAN SIBYL:*

The rich being born of the poor  
will be worshipped by the beasts of the earth.

*The ERITREAN SIBYL:*

10. God has looked from his home on high  
at his humble ones, and in the last days  
he will be born, I say, with this miracle:  
of a Hebrew Virgin of comely  
manners, her son, with no other obstacle,  
will rest in earthly cradles.

*The DELPHIC SIBYL:*

The prophet is to be born without his mother's  
coitus: his introit is a Virgin.

*The PERSIAN SIBYL:*

11. Behold, the beast will be trampled,  
and the great rejoicing Lord will be conceived.  
The womb of the blessed Virgin  
will be the salvation of the peoples of the earth.  
Born of her, his feet will be  
the strength to bear all great burdens.

*The HELLESPONTIC SIBYL:*

To prophesy one word will suffice:  
Christ Jesus will be born of the chaste one.

THE VIRGIN MARY *arises at midnight and kneels to pray and says:*

12. O highest, eternal and almighty God,  
vouchsafe to hear your creature Mary.  
Give me grace that I should be fervent  
in loving you with a pure heart and mind,  
and my neighbour and all people  
as much as it pleases you, First Nature.  
Then make me hate every vice,  
and make me grateful for all blessings.

13. Give me so much of your true light  
that I should live always in perfect humility,  
and that with all virtue and good behaviour  
I should keep by body pure and my soul unblemished.  
Fill me with your infinite flow  
of wisdom, that I should be acceptable  
in your sight, and make me do and say  
what most pleases you, sweet my Lord.

14. And I beseech you also, with all my heart,  
that I should see that singular Virgin  
who will conceive you, great Lord,  
by the Holy Ghost, without human touch.  
And I pray you, my highest creator,

that you should wish to preserve my limbs  
in such good health that I may go to her  
and become the servant of such a maid.

*The all the Angels of Paradise kneel before God the  
Father, and ONE of them on behalf of them all says:*

15. O eternal Father, o immense power,  
o highest Height, o infinite light  
Man whom you made so excellently  
in your likeness, Lord and Ruler,  
five thousand years or more in penance  
has been confined, and even now leads  
his descendants in infernal Limbo  
for one single sin, called mortal.

16. May that great charity, that holy love  
that led you to create him so worthy,  
make you have pity on his error  
so that he can come to your fair kingdom,  
for well you know, sweet Father and Lord,  
that Man was created for this noble purpose:  
to restore the heavenly seats,  
not to fill the pits of hell.

17. Let your virtue triumph over his sin,  
let your light draw him from darkness.  
Through grace and love let his failing,  
so bitter and harsh, be forgiven;  
for the worse the punishment he deserved,  
for being a murderer, traitor and thief,  
the great your goodness and mercy  
and charity will be revealed.

*MERCY kneels and prays to God the Father saying:*

18. O mighty creator, first principle,  
o immense unity, o eternal Father,  
man whom you made from mud and dirt  
has been in Hell for five thousand years.  
In my opinion, I think and believe  
that you do not wish him to remain there forever.  
If you are ever to show your mercy,  
it seem to me time to draw him forth from discord.

*PEACE kneels and prays to God the Father and says:*

19. O heavenly father, o incomprehensible peace,  
o first essence, o unchanging mind,  
Adam was made of feeling flesh  
and he was tempted by the lovable woman.  
Do you wish for this reason to keep him for ever  
in such a terrible prison, and be implacable?

Show your most holy Mercy  
and me, your Peace, sweet and most dulcet.

GOD THE FATHER *replies to Mercy and to Peace*:

20. Your words delight and please me  
because they make this holy court beautiful,  
but because I am capable of all virtue  
I want to hear your consorts,  
Justice and Truth, who hold this man  
in contumacy, with such pain and death.

*And turning to Justice and Truth, GOD says to them*:

Give your opinion, if you please,  
whether Man is to be saved and death extinguished.

*Justice and Truth speak together in secret, then*

JUSTICE *replies saying*:

21. We have heard, o true and just Father,  
what our sisters ask you.  
Adam, sinning with his followers,  
must not sit in these beautiful seats.  
Mercy and Peace are comely  
virtues, but we are not inferior to them.  
If you draw Man forth from eternal suffering,  
then Truth fails and Justice dies.

THE FATHER, *seeing their disagreement, entrusts the question to the Son saying*:

22. I have entrusted judgment to the hands  
of my Son, eternal wisdom.  
To him I entrust this dispute  
for he is the good means of all holy things.  
When he casts his just and true sentence between you  
each will have what she seeks and desires.  
Recite to him all your reasons  
so that all of you will win this case.

*The four Virtues turn to the Son, and MERCY begins to speak and says*:

23. O eternal Word, o immense beauty,  
image and splendour of the almighty Father,  
we are sent to you, our Lord,  
by the Father, your infinite Highness,  
because of difference, and quickly  
we will outline the issues,  
beseeching you that you restore us to harmony  
because the Virtues should not be in disharmony.

24. It seemed to me, blessed Mercy,  
that Adam and his descendants



should be brought forth from all his woe.  
For one single sin so bitter  
he has been in Limbo for five thousand years.  
O sweet my Lord, you see how great  
man's calamity is on account of the deceit of others.  
If you do not pardon him and give him salvation,  
I am almost dead, and I am your great virtue.

TRUTH *replies and says to the Son of God:*

25. O truth, o eternal wisdom,  
o first mould of this exemplary species,  
you see how artfully Mercy is behaving  
with this speech of hers.  
Under the guise of pity she is killing and prostrating  
her companion virtues, and would rather love  
the creature who has rebelled against you  
than me, your own Truth, and her sister.

MERCY *turns towards Truth and says:*

26. I'm not setting out to spite you,  
blessed Truth, my beloved sister.  
If my pity is against your wishes,  
you are cruel and merciless as well,  
because you will not forgive Man his sin  
and you want me to perish and die along with him.  
Must you always, so cruelly dutiful,  
leave me dead, and Man in such a dwelling place.

TRUTH *answers Mercy saying:*

27. My duty, which is so glorious,  
will not be cancelled by your words,  
because God, who is just, true and holy,  
will not wrong his virtues.

*Then TRUTH turns to the Son and says:*

And you, mighty Lord, if you free Mankind  
who rebelled against you from his great lamentation,  
then you will overturn and set aside your Father's sentence  
that says: Let Adam die, and his seed.

MERCY *says to Truth:*

28. If this sin is not forgiven,  
then I find no need for myself in Heaven.

TRUTH *says to Mercy:*

Our Father passed judgement  
that Adam should die, and this is not an empty dream

MERCY *to Truth:*

I'd be an empty dream if the chosen souls

were not saved as I desire.

TRUTH *says to Mercy:*

Say what you like, you will not kill me.

MERCY *replies:*

And you will not keep me forever dead.

PEACE, *hearing Truth and Mercy arguing, says to them:*

29. Listen to me, for I am your Peace.

It does you no honour to utter such words,  
because with us our deeds  
are usually tranquil, and soft and calm.

*Then she turns to the Son of God and says sweetly:*

O eternal Word, show us in your sweetness  
your supreme wisdom, and grant Man  
that which Mercy and Peace desire,  
for Adam is waiting in hope and in faith.

THE SON OF GOD *replies to them all:*

30. My infinite and supreme wisdom  
can soon unravel this difficult knot.  
Having heard this dispute  
I have found a worthy means and a holy way.  
Bring me pen and paper to write my sentence  
and at once I will give my judgement and sentence.  
It will be so sweet and just and pious  
that each of you will have what she desires in full.

*The Virtues bring him paper and quill and he writes his verdict  
and gives what he has written to Peace for her to read, and*

PEACE *reads it and says:*

31. Our King, who is divine wisdom  
pronounces his sentence in this fashion:  
Truth says: "I am left lifeless  
unless Man who sinned against God dies."  
Mercy claims: "I am dead  
unless Man is freed from the pain of death."  
Let a way be found to die well and make death good,  
and each will have what she has asked for.

*When they heard the sentence, they took fright and agreed that  
Man should die, but mercifully. But they asked how can death  
be made good, saying:*

32. How can death be made good  
when just the thought of it  
is horrible, not to mention having to taste  
its dire outcome and the painful experience of it?  
Your sentence leads us into dark places,

wherefore please deign to cast light on it.  
Our confusion is no less now than before  
unless you explain your holy counsel.

THE SON OF GOD *replies*:

33. The death of the wicked is always bad;  
that of the saints is good and precious.  
Let someone be found who is of such virtue  
that he is pleased to die for such a purpose,  
and who does not deserve the pain of death.  
In this way the anguish of death  
will have no power to hold the innocent man  
by will rather be the gateway to my joyous kingdom.

*This advice pleased everybody so that PEACE spoke as follows:*

34. This advice is so just and holy  
that it will put an end to our disputes.  
Go, Mercy, and search all over  
heaven to see if you can find someone of such virtue.  
And you, truth, search every corner  
of the earth for the salvation of Mankind  
and if either finds anyone of such value,  
find out if he wishes to die for love.

*Mercy searches all over Heaven, and Truth descends to Earth  
and searches throughout humankind, and no-one was found in  
Heaven with charity enough, or on Earth innocent enough.  
Then they returned and the Virtues consulted together and  
Peace said to them: "You don't know anything. Nobody is to be  
found to do good except one man. And therefore it means that  
the one who gave us this advice should help us." And PEACE  
said to the Son of God:*

35. Please hear what I have to ask and explain,  
o first counsel and splendour of your Father.  
Mercy has searched all the thrones  
of the angelic throngs in Heaven.  
Truth sought out your fair creatures  
on earth, in search of such a gift,  
and since we find no-one who can do this,  
having given your advice, now grant us your aid urgently.

THE SON OF GOD *sighed and resolved to grant his aid and  
redeem Mankind, and he said to them all:*

36. When Adam broke my divine precept  
he acted against me, against infinite good,  
wherefore Justice desires that for his sin  
he should be punished without end.  
Therefore it is necessary to find someone so perfect  
that he is clothed in infinite worth.  
Neither man nor angel can do this,

only god can be worth of this.

37. To me, the Son, has been given  
truth, light and eternal wisdom,  
and every sin that deprives Man of life  
has ignorance as its guiding light.  
If ignorance inflicts a mortal wound  
wisdom tends it and treats it,  
so it is for me to eliminate sin  
for even so it is prophesied by all.

38. I am almost sorry I created Man  
for on his account I am constrained to suffer death.  
Go, Gabriel, to Limbo, and knock at the door,  
and say that soon I will open those gates:  
by paying the ransom for the forbidden apple  
I will lead them with me to this heavenly court,  
and show my infinite goodness  
by giving eternal life after sin.

*The ANGEL GABRIEL goes to Limbo and knocks at the gates  
and says:*

39. Adam, listen to the Angel Gabriel  
for I am sent to you by God on high.  
In Heaven there has been a fine dispute  
over you among the Virtues, I never heard  
such sweet words, and when it was done  
the eternal Word, all sweet and holy,  
has decided to take flesh, and with his holy death  
he will lead you to Heaven, where there is singing and dancing.

*ADAM replies to the Angel:*

40. The punishment that has followed on my sin  
shows how great my guilt was,  
but it is even clearer if I have to be  
redeemed by the death of God,  
and given that I rebelled against God  
(though I always hoped in the Messiah and Saviour),  
I rejoice and am comforted to leave Limbo,  
but it pains me the more that God should die for me.

*When the Angel returns, THE SON OF GOD says to him:*

41. Go quickly, Gabriel, to Galilee  
to the city of Nazareth,  
and you will find a Virgin among the Jews  
married to Joseph.  
Her name is Mary, and as one divine  
she will be exalted for her humility.  
You will greet her virginal state  
as is required by such a mystery.

42. You will announce to her that she is full of grace  
and that I, the Lord God, am always with her.  
To save Mankind and to satisfy her desire,  
I wish for my great love of him to take flesh,  
for I see how his sin torments him,  
locked in Limbo and unable to leave.  
While remaining a virgin in all her heart and body  
she will conceive such an excellent fruit.

43. The Holy Ghost will come upon her  
and she will be surrounded by his light.  
He who will be born so wondrously  
will be the son of God, eternal guide.  
Let her call him Jesus, and under her mantle  
all men will be saved who lead  
good lives, and make this speech in such a way  
that she consents to this incarnation.

THE ANGEL GABRIEL *goes to the Virgin Mary and finds her  
praying as she meditated on the “Ecce Virgo concipiet”<sup>1</sup> and  
he says to her reverently:*

44. God save you, for you are full of grace,  
the great Lord God is with you.  
Be blessed, o serene Virgin,  
among all women of desire.

*The Virgin Mary stands up in fear and fright:*

Mary, come, fear not, for I come  
not to harm you but to bring you joy.  
You have found grace with the Lord,  
so hear my words with rejoicing.

45. Behold, you will conceive a son  
and you will bring him forth, and you will call him  
Jesus, and he will be beyond compare,  
and you will hear men call him  
the Son of the Highest, and by divine counsel  
you will see him sit on the throne of the Father  
in the house of Jacob, forever,  
his rule will endure for all eternity.

THE VIRGIN MARY *asks:*

46. How can what you have told me be true  
when I have no carnal knowledge of any man.

THE ANGEL *answers:*

The perfect gift of the Holy Ghost

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<sup>1</sup> Communion antiphon for the Fourth Sunday of Advent; Isaiah 7:14.

will come most perfectly upon you,  
and the virtue of God will cast its holy shadow  
within your breast and all over you  
so that he who will be born of you  
will be called the holy Son of God.

47. And behold, Elizabeth, your sister-in-law,  
has conceived a son in her old age.  
It is six months since this grace  
was given to her by divine virtue,  
when everybody called her barren.  
God, the greatest salvation, can do all things.

THE VIRGIN MARY *kneels and crossing her arms on her breast*  
*she says humbly:*

Behold the Handmaiden of the Lord God.  
Let it be done unto me according to your holy words.

*Then the Holy Ghost comes upon her, and there is great*  
*rejoicing in Heaven, and the Angel returns to Heaven.*

*Finally* AN ANGEL *says:*

48. Having heard and understood the infinite love  
that sweet God has shown to you in your ingratitude,  
and the great humility that was in the heart  
of Mary, through whom you are saved,  
all must be full of fervour  
and follow virtue free from sin,  
carrying the Virgin Annunciate within their hearts.  
Let all go on their way: you are free to depart.