

Woman of the Book

A reflection on Antonello da Messina's

"Virgine Annunciate"

In memory and gratitude for Ruth and Rita Beaudoin, SUSC

She sits before an open book

Fine script on parchment.

No trace of letters illumined

In saffron, malachite or vermilion.

Only creamy fiber-flecked pages

Simply crafted and sewn into one –

A form unknown in her time.

The Book –

Evoking ancient scrolls

Centuries of story, passed in oral tradition –

Gathered and angled here to draw us in.

She sits before a symbol –

The Book of Life

The life of a people – called the chosen.

A people who retell the story

Words and Actions –

The Lord in their lives.

Is she remembering

The words of the *Shema*?

Words she has surely heard day after day,

Prayed, day after day.

Shema, Yisrael,

Adonai eloheinu,

Adonai echad. (Duet 6:4-5)

Does she, once again, let awe and praise fill her?

Or is she remembering

Her ancestors' escape from slavery?

 Their hardships – their journey from darkness to light?

She sits within a stark, simple setting –

A black background,

 Evoking a dark past.

Her face formed and lightened

 in a triangle of blue-gray scarf,

 Evoking the possibility of hope.

Does she remember the words of the prophet,

By now says the Lord,

Who created you, O Israel, and formed you,

For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy ne,

Your Savior. (Isa 43:1,3)

Do her thoughts turn to today?

To the misery of Roman oppression?

Does she then cry out,

When, O Lord, when will you come and save us?

Is it then?

Is it then – the Lord's word

Falls like light upon the open pages of her life?

Rejoice, oh highly favored daughter.

The Lord is with you... (Luke 1: 28)

Is it then

 Her eyes lift from text to voice?

Is it then

Her hands react to words unexpected?

She gathers her scarf with one

and pushes back with the other –

How can this be? (Luke 1: 34)

Is it now?

Will this Yeshua save our people?

In her confusion, does she search another word?

The Lord is my light

And my salvation. (Ps 27)

Does she begin to sing it,

Light filling her heart?

Shema...

The Holy Spirit will come upon you,

And the power of the Most High

Will overshadow you. (Luke 1: 35)

Do her thoughts race to some unknown mythic time –

When the Spirit, a might wind swept over the waters. (Gen 1: 2)

Does she “hear” the word of the Lord bringing forth life?

Shema ...

I am the servant of the Lord.

Let it be done to me as you say. (Luke 1:38)

To sit before the open Book –

Listening...

What words fall upon the open pages of my life?

Today? Tomorrow? ...

Shema ...

Susam Morton

