

or mine,—this, I am told is the view even of the scientists who criticize,—yet as a miracle it stands alone; for, in coming to Christ, we must learn at the outset that, as the Angel Gabriel expressed it, “with God nothing is impossible.” Essentially, Christ’s birth was different from ours. He was born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but as a gift from God, unsought and undeserved and free—and in one of His earliest recorded utterances He tells us that our souls must be born again, like that.

Painters show us the Annunciation as a flash of golden light, descending on Mary, as she knelt in her quiet and simply arranged chamber. What actually happened was no such spectacle. The Angel Gabriel, glorious with the radiance of heavenly service, spoke to her: she listened, she answered, and the Spirit of God came upon her. Mary displayed neither doubt nor fear; and her surprise was not at the Angel; for, as John learnt when he witnessed the glories of heaven, angels are bound with us to one common obedience. But the Angel’s salutation, his salutation to her,—this it was that perplexed her, for his words were like no other greeting that she had ever heard. For what reason was she, in her obscure station in life, to be highly favored among women? She did not speak, but the Angel reassured her, with the yet more tremendous news that she should bear a son. Then, indeed, as a maiden of stainless integrity, she was entitled to put a question, direct and unmistakable, as from an equal to an equal. No girl, betrothed as she was to an honorable and upright man, could have done otherwise—and it mattered nothing that, while she was only a village maiden, Gabriel was a