

We are forever attempting to tabernacle God for ourselves; finding a place for God which we can clearly identify and then control, but God is not of this nature at all. Indeed, the very word 'God' is a failed attempt at pinning something down which inevitably escapes us. In this sense, we cannot talk of God at all. We could, at this point, all pack our bags and go home. But it's too late. God has already found us, chosen to inhabit our world from top to toe: to be 'as if' an interior principle to all that exists which means, of course, there is no interior set apart from what is exterior. It's all one. It's all God. Hence, Nathan's words to David: there's no point in your building a place for God. God is perfectly capable of doing this for you. Indeed, God has already done so in speaking the creative Word. Your job is to listen to that Word and let it re-create you.

Now, before we get to Mary, in this respect, there is, I hope, an interesting digression we can make via one of the descendants of Charles Longuet Higgins who was responsible for the rebuilding of this church (All Saints, Turvey), much of the village and Turvey Abbey, in the mid nineteenth century. I'm referring to the work of Professor Christopher Longuet Higgins who used to live just across the road from us but worked at the University of Sussex as a mathematician. His speciality was exploring musical notation and performance to see if it was reducible to a computer programme (I may well have described this badly) and what he found, if I've interpreted John Barrow's description accurately, is that

There is no 'rule' for generating the next note in a piece of music that depends only upon the last note, or even upon all the notes played so far. (p. 248 The Artful Universe Expanded)

We are in the realm of what John Barrow later calls

incessant novelty that cannot be encompassed by any finite set of rules: 'beauty', 'ugliness', 'truth', 'harmony', 'simplicity', and 'poetry' are names we give to some of the attributes of this sort. (p260)

Much more can be said of this, suffice it to say that it's all a matter of 'performance.' Now, I wonder if that can help us understand what is going on between Nathan and David, and Gabriel and Mary, and God and us? We are being spoken to in innumerable, incessant ways but most of the time we remain tone deaf, unable to hear the subtlety of what is going on, tending towards an artificial understanding, something made by us which blocks out this deeper prevailing melody: an artificial intelligence which can only interpret notes in terms of set rules. God is not of this order and nor are we. Hence David can say 'yes' to God through Nathan, and Mary can say 'yes' to God through Gabriel and we can say 'yes' to God, now, through his Son, the culmination of all those previous notes which are still incessantly at play in us, and all creation, too. None of this is predictable and we can always say 'no' – and yet it happens so.

Br John Mayhead
Monastery of Christ Our Saviour