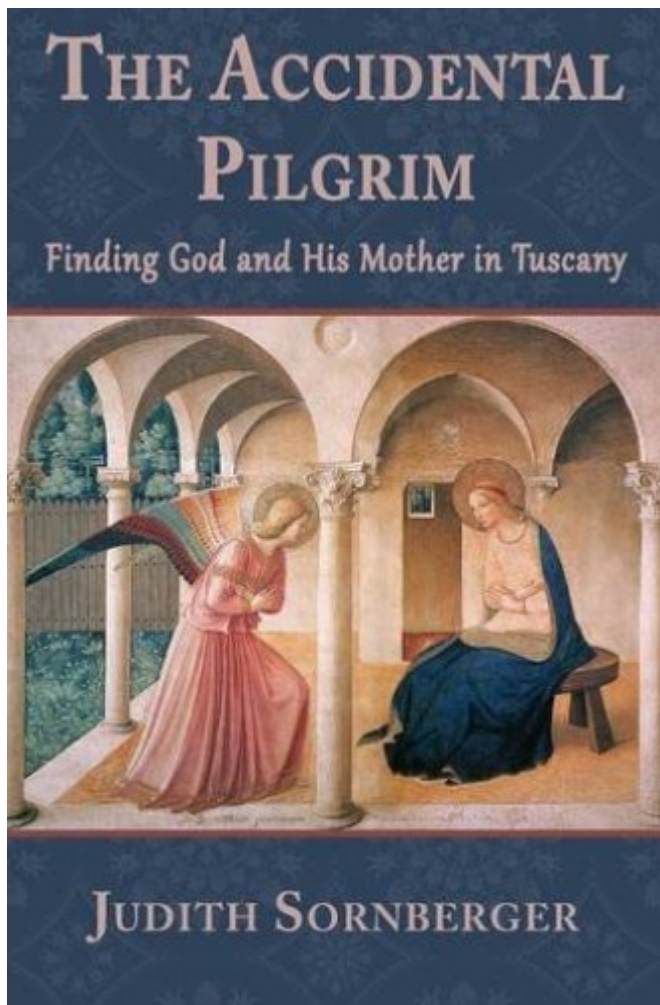


Glimpses of Mary

By [Amy Frykholm](#)

December 14, 2015

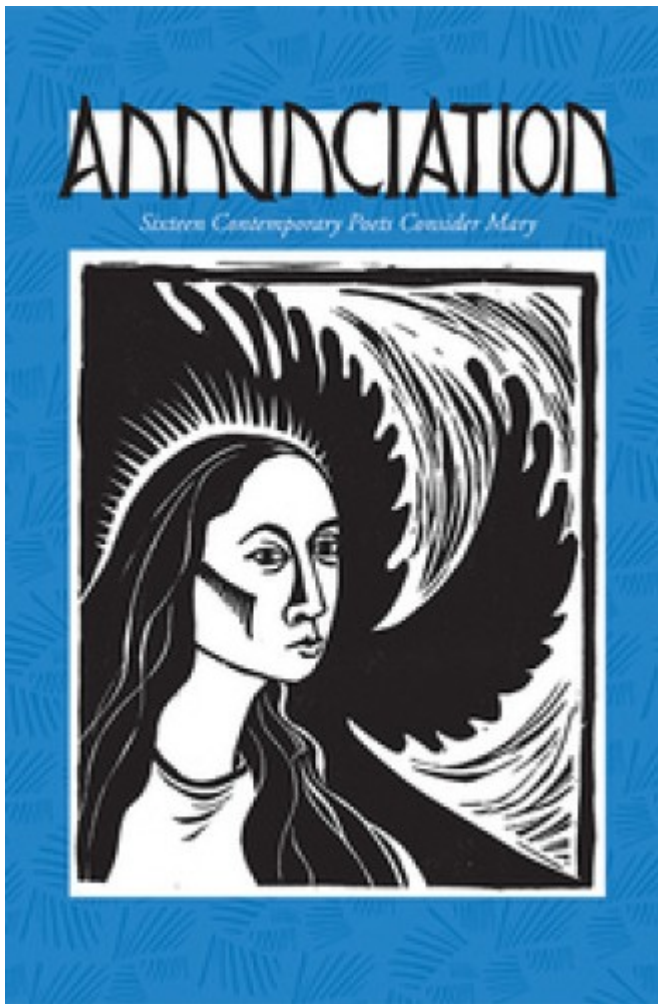
In Review



The Accidental Pilgrim

by Judith Sornberger

Shanti Arts



Annunciation

Phoenicia Publishing

In the latest issue of the *Century*, Philip Jenkins [writes](#) about how the veneration of Mary cuts across religious difference in Egypt. Egypt was the place where Mary first lit up the imaginations of Christians, but apparently her appeal is not limited by culture or religious heritage. Lately I've come across a couple of enchanting books that illuminate this for me.

One is [The Accidental Pilgrim: Finding God and His Mother in Tuscany](#), a travel memoir and meditation on art, written by poet Judith Sornberger. Sornberger takes the reader on a romp through Tuscany at the moment when her own spiritual and religious sensibilities are being rekindled. She is in search of images of the annunciation, when the angel Gabriel reveals God's plans for Mary's life.

My favorite moments in the book are those in which Sornberger looks deeply and carefully at images that I might pass over in a glance. I admit I am not a fan of Renaissance art, but Sornberger's careful eye made me look twice and appreciate the variety of expression and meaning in Mary's face at the encounter with an angel. Maybe because I am short, my favorite image was Fra Angelico's [Annunciation \(Cell Three\)](#) at the Cloister of San Marco, where a tiny Mary meets the angel while standing on a foot stool. Sornberger is a lifelong lapsed Protestant, and her attachment to Mary takes her by surprise as she wanders through Italy, letting the Mother of God lead her toward God, as many before her have done.

The other book is *Annunciation*, a [collection of poems](#) by contemporary poets from many different religious traditions (and no tradition), all reflecting on Mary. Muslim, Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, Hindu and secular poets from all over the world give us a glimpse of Mary from their particular location.

Rachel Barenblatt looks at Mary through the eyes of Miriam, the sister of Moses. Kristin Berkey-Abbott identifies with the angel Gabriel as he tries to find a virgin in contemporary Miami. Tunisian-American poet Leila Chatti remembers learning about Mary at age 14 in her Muslim Sunday school.

In her poem "The moment before everything," Romanian-American poet Claudia Serea depicts Gabriel watching Mary sleeping. Here's an excerpt (used by permission):

I wanted to breathe in
your innocent air,

look at your soft,
surrendered hands,
your eyelids beating
inside a dream,

another second,
another one,

before I told you the news.