

Margaret Adams Parker

“Mary As Prophet” » Virginia Theological Seminary » Alexandria, Virginia



Commissioned to honor the significance of women’s ministries in the Church, this sculpture is sited on a small terrace just outside the walls of the seminary’s 1881 chapel (preserved as a sanctified space after a 2010 fire) and within view of the 2015 chapel.

The sculpture depicts the Visitation (Luke 1:39-56), when Mary goes to visit her older cousin, Elizabeth, and sings the Magnificat (prophetic words that echo Hannah’s song in 1 Samuel 2:1-10): “He has scattered the proud...cast down the mighty...lifted up the lowly...” Mary and Elizabeth are seen as African women, Mary very young, Elizabeth very old.

Mary is tense with prophecy, her focus turned inward. Elizabeth moves toward Mary, bending and reaching forward to support her.

The bronze figures are 48 inches high. The base sets their heads at eye level, giving the impression that the figures are full-sized. In the primary view one “reads” the sculpture from left to right, our attention moving from Elizabeth to rest on Mary, the Prophet. To encourage viewers to walk around to the secondary view (where one’s gaze moves from Mary to linger on Elizabeth’s comforting presence) the figures are angled on the base and sited well away from the wall. A bench

invites visitors to spend time in reflection.

The figures are a significant presence on this campus, an axis linking old and new; old chapel and new; old age and youth; Christian Old Testament and New. As African women they embody the seminary’s ties with churches in Africa and reflect the composition of the Anglican Communion. This depiction of Mary and Elizabeth as ordinary (rather than idealized) women reminds viewers of the church’s call to “lift up the lowly.” The Archbishop of Canterbury, consecrating the sculpture, remarked that he sees these same women in refugee camps and other areas of conflict and deprivation.



Jury Comments

This sculpture takes a radically different approach to the story of Mary and Elizabeth, and moves the narrative in a new direction. They are shown supporting each other, which is part of the message. The work portrays a comforting and trusting gesture. The size and scale of the piece, and placing it in the ruins of a former chapel, makes it relatable, and you can be at an eye-to-eye level with the subjects.

Artist

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