

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Christ Our Savior Lutheran Church

“The Angel Gabriel from Heaven Came”

Luke 1:26-38

²⁶ In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. ²⁸ The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”

²⁹ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰ But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”

³⁴ “How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”

³⁵ The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. ³⁶ Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. ³⁷ For no word from God will ever fail.”

³⁸ “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her.

“In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel” (Luke 1:26).

This was the moment the angels had been waiting for ever since Adam and Eve fell into sin. Ever since they were sent to guard the entrance to Eden and the Tree of Life. Ever since God promised to send a Savior. God always knew when he was going to do it, but the angels did not. And when God called Gabriel to himself and gave him the news to deliver, what joy and excitement there must have been among the angels! The time had come, and Gabriel was the appointed messenger.

“In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David...” (Luke 1:26-27).

Not to Jerusalem, but to Nazareth, was the angel Gabriel sent. And not to the prominent daughter of a priest or the privileged daughter of one of Israel’s ruling elders, but to an unmarried virgin engaged to a carpenter who was a descendant of David. Which is appropriate, since God was now beginning to build that house we heard him promise David in today’s First Lesson. And so to Nazareth the angel Gabriel from heaven came ... to a carefully chosen virgin whose “name was Mary” (Luke 1:27).

“The angel went to her and said, ‘Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.’ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be” (Luke 1:28-29).

Interesting. She wasn’t troubled at this angel’s appearing, as Zechariah had been and as the shepherds around Bethlehem would be. She was “greatly troubled at his words”. For he didn’t simply say “Greetings” or “Hail” or even “Ave, Maria.” He literally said, “Rejoice!” Rejoice because you are the favored one. Rejoice because the Lord is with you. Mary didn’t understand and kept asking herself, ‘What’s going on here? Why is he saying such things to me? Why would God even notice me, let alone be with me?’ But Gabriel is undeterred. He faithfully and patiently – although probably about ready to burst with joy! – delivers the message God had entrusted to him.

“Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end” (Luke 1:30-33).

And what an amazing message it was! A virgin will have a baby. And he will be the true son of Mary, flesh of her flesh, as human as she is. He will grow and eat and sleep and breath as does every other human being. Yet her son will be “the Son of the Most High” who made and rules all things ... who was before all things ... whom all the angels worship and adore. Mary is going to be not just the mother of a baby boy, but the mother of God. Who will from the moment of his birth fulfill the promises made to David and Jacob, and will reign over God’s people “forever; his kingdom will never end.” That means his kingdom will be one that death cannot touch. For Mary’s son would be born to destroy it by his own sacrificial death in payment of humanity’s sins. I wonder how big Gabriel’s smile was when he uttered these wonderful words!

“How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?” (Luke 1:34).

Notice Mary doesn’t doubt saying something like, “How can this be?” She asks, “How will this be?” Faith believes, though there seems to be no small obstacle to her conceiving.

“The angel answered, ‘The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God’” (Luke 1:35).

The Spirit which hovered over the waters at creation and gave life, will do so again, in Mary. And conceived of the Holy Spirit, the child born to her would be holy, pure and sinless. For a sinless, spotless Lamb is required to atone for sin. And so the Life of the World would be given his life in Mary’s womb.

“For no word from God will ever fail” (Luke 1:37).

Gabriel told her. They did not fail in creating the world and bringing forth all life upon it. They will not fail in bringing forth life from Mary’s womb. They will not fail when Mary’s son speaks them to the sick and even the dead! For he will speak God’s Word to comfort and bless, to give faith, to forgive sins, to make simple water the vehicle for the Holy Spirit to hover in newborn hearts, to make bread and wine his body and blood. No word from God will ever fail whether spoken by Jesus, by angels, by apostles, by you and by me.

“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled” (Luke 1:38).

And so it is also with us, who like Mary understand that we do not deserve to be even noticed by God. Yet we are not only noticed, we are “highly favored.” For how else would you describe those for whom God’s Word says Jesus was conceived, those in whom the Holy Spirit by means of that same Word has conceived faith!?! Faith that responds as Mary did, “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Fulfilled in what it says about my sins being forgiven; fulfilled in who it says I am: God’s own child! Finally and fully when it says to me, “Arise!” and I do from my grave. To life eternal in his everlasting kingdom where sin and death and sadness are no more. Where the one who was once cradled in the arms of Mary will then embrace you in his.

“Then the angel left her” (Luke 1:38).

But the separation is only temporary. For Mary and Gabriel will meet again, as will we, as together we all bow before the Child born of Mary and worship him in eternal joy. Farewells we speak in sadness now – and there’s been some this year, hasn’t there? – will be overshadowed by the joy of his welcome then, when all who have trusted in this Child reunite in him.

So Gabriel departs – his message delivered, his privileged job completed. And who remains behind with us is God himself, Immanuel. As he has promised, “I am with you always to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). And no word from God will ever fail.

Not this Word.

Not the Word made flesh.

Amen.

Prayer of the Day

- L: Stir up your power, O Lord, and come. Take away the burden of our sins and make us ready for the celebration of your birth, that we may receive you in joy and serve you always; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
- C: **[sung] Amen.**

Prayers of the Church

- L: Prayer for Advent [p. 123]

Announcements

1. Christmas Eve 4:30 pm & 6:00 pm.
2. Christmas Day 10:00 am.
3. Sarah Seelow called to COS
4. Merry Christmas!