

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Second Sunday in Advent, December 9, 2012

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 10, 78, 274, 104, 343:2.

Lessons: Isaiah 7:13-14, Galatians 3:22-4:9, Matthew 1:18-25.

Sermon Text: Luke 1:26-38.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

You are a witness today again to what has been called the greatest miracle that could happen. It is really several miracles blended into one. First, it is the birth of a son to a woman who is a virgin. And a second part of that miracle is that this son who is the very Son of God also born as a human is come to redeem mankind, to save them from their sins.

Last Sunday you were introduced to the angel Gabriel. Now he has a second major job, another important mission for God in the short span of about 6 months. This time Gabriel does not go to the temple in the holy city of Jerusalem, but to a humble town in Galilee, not to an old man but to a young maiden. The promised child for Zechariah and Elizabeth was an answer to many prayers. The child promised to Mary was also the answer to prayers, many, many more prayers as well as the fulfillment of many Old Testament prophecies. But the child to be born of Mary was a total and complete surprise to her. The angel Gabriel's first message of the New Testament was given in the secrecy of the Holy Place in the Temple, the second in the seclusion of a virgin's home in Nazareth. Nazareth was one of those "nowhere places", for Nathanael, who became a disciple of Jesus, mockingly said in John 1:46: "*Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?*"

This was a child born of a virgin – something totally and altogether new in the history of mankind. However, it was not, or should not have been unexpected, for God said, as you heard in our Old Testament lesson, "*Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.*" (Isaiah 7:14)

But more than that: The promised child will be the Son of the Most High, the Son of God. His kingdom will never end. Today let us remember what has been called

THE ANNUNCIATION

- 1. A virgin shall conceive and bear a son.**
- 2. All the Messianic prophecies of the OT will be fulfilled in him.**
- 3. Remember, Nothing is impossible with God.**

"In the sixth month [of the pregnancy of Elizabeth, the wife of Zechariah], 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. The virgin's name was Mary. '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. But the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God.'"

Was this difficult for Mary to believe? Without a doubt. Surely. Yet her faith shines brightly in contrast to the doubts of the priest Zechariah. At the end of the angel's astonishing announcement and visit, we read: "*I am the Lord's servant,' Mary answered. 'May it be to me as you have said.'"*

Zechariah, as a servant of God, did his duty in the temple. Mary's service was special and unique. She is to be the mother of God. This was a virgin maiden who was to give birth to an infant conceived by the Holy

Spirit – surely a greater miracle than the birth of John, the son of Zechariah and Elizabeth, the man who came to be known as John the Baptist.

Despite elaborate traditions that have been fabricated, we know very little about Mary. Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, a descendant of David. She herself also came from that royal family of David. Her son would be given the throne of his father David. Paul writes in Romans 1:3: ***"regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David."*** Genealogies in both Matthew and Luke include David among the ancestors of Christ.

The angel calls her one that has been highly favored by God. That literally means filled with grace, that she has been given a special measure of God's undeserved love and mercy. She is not a mother of grace or one who gives out grace, but the angel speaks to her as a recipient of grace. She is given the assurance that the Lord is with her. Mary had nothing to do with this blessed event, that is, she did not cause it or seek it out. It was God's grace visiting her.

"The Lord is with you." She is fully dependent upon Him, her God and her Savior. The effect of the sudden vision of the angel and the strange greeting certainly startled and troubled her: ***"Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be."***

The angel quickly proceeds to enlighten her by telling her not to fear. Although she was the chosen mother of the Savior, yet she was in need of God's grace. Though the Virgin Mary is blessed above all women, that such grace and honor was never given to any other woman, yet the angel with these words draws her down to the level of all other believers, since he clearly says: Whatever she may be she is by grace, and not by merit.

And now the angel explains the extraordinary distinction which would be conferred upon her. ***"You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name 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 the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."***

She would, as a virgin, conceive and give birth to a son. This was quite a shock to her, and to Joseph, her espoused husband. They had not lived together as husband and wife as you heard in our gospel lesson. Joseph did not want her exposed to public disgrace and we read: ***"Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.'" (Matthew 1:20-21)***

Jesus, the very Son of God would also be a true human being, though born of a virgin. The angel makes it clear to both Mary and Joseph in their separate visits from the angel what the child's name will be. He should be called Jesus, which means Savior, Redeemer. Though the name was by no means unknown among the Jews, it would here be applied in its full significance for the first time. Of this miracle-child the angel says that He will be great. His human nature was to be united with the divine nature, and because he was truly the Son of God, he would be called the Son of the Highest. In him would be fulfilled all the prophecies pointing to the Messiah. As the promised Son of David he would rule forever, not just for a time in an earthly kingdom. He would be the everlasting Head and king of the house of Jacob, of the Church, because His government and kingdom would be eternal. The gates and powers of death and hell shall never be able to injure or destroy the kingdom of Christ.

The sum and substance of the entire Gospel-message is contained in these words of the angel. The angel asserts that this son is at the same time true man and true God. He is to be born like any other human baby, except there is no human father involved in his conception. But He is also true God and shall be called the Son of God. This cannot possibly be said of anyone that is a mere man, since it belongs to God only that He is a King without end. This King is immortal and eternal. He has a different kingdom than that of this world.

Mary does not understand how this all can take place: ***"'How will this be,' Mary asked the angel, 'since I am a virgin?' The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon 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.'"***

Mary had received wonderful, overwhelming news that she could hardly be expected to comprehend, that she, an unknown, poor maiden, should be the mother of the Messiah. This was exactly what the angel had told her. In humble trust she was ready to accept the message. But she feels compelled to ask for an explanation, not a sign. She knew only of the ordinary course of nature by which children are conceived and born into the world, and which presupposes two parents, a human father and a human mother. She knew herself to be a pure virgin, no man having known her. The angel answers her question. The Holy Spirit, the Power of the Highest, the miraculous life-producing Power, would conceive a child in her. No human father would be present or necessary. The creative power of God would come upon her, overshadow her, and so the child which would be born would be called holy, the Son of God.

The faith of Mary under these trying circumstances is certainly remarkable. Mary here has no example in all creatures on earth to which she could look and thus strengthen herself. All earthly examples of birth contradict what the angel tells her.

She must cling to the Word alone which the angel proclaimed to her from God. As it happened to Mary with her faith, so it happens to all of us, that when God speaks to us in his Holy inspired Word, the Bible, we must believe what is opposed to our understanding, thoughts, experience, and example. For that is the nature of faith, that it must rest only on the mere Word of God and God's divine promise. We read in Hebrews 11:1: ***"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."***

The angel gives Mary some more information which would tend to set her mind at ease and reassure her. He tells her that her kinswoman, Elisabeth, who was of an age in which women can no longer have children and who had been considered barren, was going to have a child.

"For nothing is impossible with God" is the truth that Gabriel tells Mary. With God there is impossible not one thing. Every Word of promise which He has made He will carry out at His right time. Mary can rely upon God's Word without doubting. This news about Elizabeth would be a powerful support for her faith. And in this way Mary accepted the message in its entirety. She simply believed. She put herself entirely into the Lord's service, as His servant. His work will be carried out in her. Hers was not only obedient submission, but also patient, longing expectation. She was ready to be the mother of the God-man, just as the angel had said. She herself had been conceived and born in sin, after the manner of all ordinary human beings, but her Son, born of a woman, yet without having been conceived in sin, is the holy Son of God, the Redeemer of the world.

We know the words – many of us have memorized them: ***"The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel"*** (Isaiah 7:14) but to really know and understand the idea and the importance of the idea is nearly impossible.

Just as Mary had nothing to do with this special grace of God coming upon her, so all Christians have nothing to do with the blessed event of their coming to faith.

God's only-begotten Son is to be conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary. In this miraculous way God sent his only-begotten Son into the world to redeem sinners. Thank you, dear Lord, for this miracle! Amen.