

The grace, mercy, and peace of Jesus Christ, our coming Lord, and King be yours this day! The title for today’s sermon is “Christ: the Incarnate Lord”, and it is based on the Gospel reading from St. Luke, the 1st chapter. Let us pray.... Amen.

Today is the last Sunday in Advent. The focus is based on the wonderful promised by the prophet Nathan to King David, recorded in today’s Old Testament lesson: **“But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, ⁵ “Go and tell my servant David, ‘Thus says the LORD:... And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.’ ”**(2 Samuel 7:4-5,16) God promised David a descendant unlike any other the world would see: One who would sit on David’s throne forever.

And so the people waited for the coming King of kings. Generations passed. More prophets came with more promises about the Messiah. And more generations passed. Century after century passed and no Messiah.

Then one day, as we heard in today’s Gospel reading, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a one sheep town in Galilee called Nazareth. Yet, there was much more going on than simply a nice conversation between the angel Gabriel and the virgin Mary: forgiveness and salvation were coming. Just six months previous, the same angel proclaimed to aged Zechariah that he and his barren wife Elizabeth would conceive and have a son. And not just any son, but one who, in the spirit and power of Elijah, would prepare the way for the coming Lord.

Now, this same angel, Gabriel, came to Mary to proclaim the Lord’s favour, or grace, to her. For the time had finally come for God to unveil Himself to His creation and get intimately involved to save us from ourselves and our sinful condition. As God was about to physically enter into His creation, Gabriel was sent to bring the Good News. The angels were excited as we hear every year at Christmas, when they proclaimed the Good News to the Shepherds, and the Good News for you and me.

So here, Gabriel came and said to Mary, “Greetings, O graced one, the Lord is with you.” I say ‘graced’ because, first of all that is the root of the Greek word the angel used, and secondly and more importantly Mary is not favoured because of what Mary had done, or was doing; rather she was favoured because of what God was in the process of doing, pouring out His grace on her. Mary was simply the recipient and about to receive the highest honour of any living person in history: she would be the *Θεοτοκος*, the mother of God! And so of course the angel was excited, the prophecies long foretold of this event.

But Mary is only confused and troubled by the angel’s greeting and she tried to understand his words. *Angels just don’t come and talk to people everyday, mainly virgins in the small town of Nazareth!* So the angel continued with **“Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found grace with God.”** Again, it is because of the pouring out of God’s grace on her that she has found favour with God. The angel sets up what is going to happen soon and why.

Because then the angel gets to the good part, the part all creation has been groaning for since the Fall: ³¹ **And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.”** Gabriel will say almost the same thing to Joseph later on, but here he tells

Mary exactly what is going to happen and why and how God is pouring out His grace on her, and by extension to you and I as well. His name will be Jesus, meaning “**He will save his people from their sins.**”(Matthew 1:21b)

Gabriel continues and now starts to teach Mary what kind of son will be conceived in her. He said, “³²**He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.**” His Father is not just any Father, it is the Lord God Almighty Himself. Gabriel is starting to describe the Incarnation to Mary, of God coming down in the flesh, the same flesh and bones we have. But this Son wont just be big, rather “**the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David,** ³³**and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.**” This son, is the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises and prophecies. This Son of Mary would also be the Son of God and the long promised king of Israel, who would live and reign for eternity.

As Gabriel talked with Mary, what God said through the prophet Isaiah was being realized. Isaiah wrote: “**For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.** ⁹**For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.** ¹⁰**“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,** ¹¹ **so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”***(Isaiah 55:8-11)*

Just as, from the speaking of God's Word, faith is created and planted as we hear in Romans: “**For faith comes by hearing, and hearing the word of Christ.**”(Romans 10:17), and Christ is truly present in the Lord's Supper after the speaking of the Words of Institution, as Gabriel talked with Mary, the Lord was present with her in two senses. He would come upon her and overshadow her, AND the presence of the Lord would be in her womb. As Gabriel spoke God's Word, Christ was being conceived in her womb. The new era of salvation begins with the conception of Jesus in Mary. Jesus, the Christ, the God of all creation entered into human flesh, into our world and became part of it. The new era of salvation comes through the baby conceived by the gracious actions of God upon Mary, who finds favour with God—NOT due to any superiority over other women or any merit in God's estimation, BUT simply because of God's good pleasure.

This grace, this favour, of God is the same for all people who are incorporated into the kingdom of God by the pure grace of God, and therefore. This is the same with the church, where faith is born by the pure grace of God. It is God coming to us by the Means He prescribes and gives; namely His revealed Word and Sacrament! As Eve, from the Garden of Eden, contained in her womb all humanity that was doomed to sin, now Mary, by the pure and underserved grace of God, contained in her womb the new Adam who will father a new humanity by His grace (Romans 5:12-21). This is why the angel says “Rejoice” for Israel and all humanity is now reborn through the Son IN Mary's womb. The Lord is with Mary—He is with His church.

But you might ask, ‘Why does it really matter?’ and ‘How does this affect me?’

Well, the reason Christ came, why He took on our flesh and blood is because you, me, and all people—we are sinners. Scripture is very clear on this point: “**all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God**”(Romans 3:21). As sinner we had separated ourselves from God and could not save ourselves. Given the nature of God and the nature of man, our sin should make us into the target of God’s wrath. The wages of sin, what our sin earns, is temporal and eternal death and separation from God.

In our sinful condition we NEED Christ; not just a little, but entirely and completely. As sinners we were dead in our sin. Apart from Christ, and in sin, we were enemies of God.

Sin makes Jesus Incarnation and birth matter. Our struggles and sufferings and pain and shortcomings and failures make Jesus’ Incarnation not just matter, but makes it the most important thing in all history when combined with His death and resurrection.

Jesus left heaven and came to where we are. Instead of being born in a castle, He came to where us sinners are. He was born in a barn, separated from the rest of the people, just are we are separated from other apart from Christ, and also separated from God. Jesus came in order to bring us all back together.

Without Jesus Incarnation, we would be dead in our sins and alone to face the consequences of our sins, the attacks of the world, and the devil. Without Jesus Incarnation we would be lost eternally. But Jesus did come to save you and me from our sins “**by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.**”(Colossians 2:12-14)

Jesus came to save sinners. He came to bring comfort to the suffering. Jesus came to healing to the sick. Christ came to release us from the crushing demands of the Law. In short, Christ Jesus came to bring life to the dead: you, me, and all humanity! Jesus intervened in human history—in His fallen creation—and He continues to intervene in His fallen world with His forgiveness, His grace, His comfort, His peace, and His salvation. Jesus came to save sinners: Mary, Joseph, you, me, and all people.

Christ continues to come to you with His gifts every time you hear His Word and receive His Sacrament. God works through tangible means, through His Means of Grace, where He promises the Holy Spirit will be working. Even today, God continues to dwell among us in His Word, in the sacraments, and in the mutual consolation we share with one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.

It has been well said that we must seek Christ not only **while** He may be found, but also **where** He may be found. Mary was directed to the Incarnate Lord conceived child in her womb. The shepherds were given this direction: “**This will be a sign to you:**”—a proof that you have found Him whom you were seeking—“**You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.**”

We are now directed to: “God’s Word, Baptism, and the Lord’s Supper as the manger and the swaddling-clothes into which it pleases Christ to lay Himself.” The lowliness may seem absurd to some, but this is where our Lord says He will be found, and nowhere else.” Yet, despite our blinded eyes, and unworthiness, through His Means of Grace is where the Incarnate Lord Jesus Christ, the One promised to Mary by the angel, finds you, where He comes to you, where He brings you His forgiveness, His peace, and His salvation.

Jesus’ Incarnation matters because: that is how He came to save you from your sins: by His life, death, and resurrection in your place. Jesus’ Incarnation matters because: the Holy Spirit continues to bring you Christ’s gifts of peace, forgiveness, comfort, and salvation when you hear His Word and receive His body and blood in the Lord’s Supper. Jesus’ Incarnation matters because: Jesus is also going to come again. On Judgement Day, all who rejected Christ Jesus’ gifts He earned for them by His death and resurrection for them, will be eternally separated from God and condemned to spend eternity in hell. In death, as on Judgment Day, there will be no second chances. Yet, for those who have been given the gift of faith by the hearing of God’s Word, those will be given the gift of eternal life in the new heavens and earth and be eternally in the presence of God.

Without God coming in the flesh – without the incarnation, all the other comings of God would do us no good. Without the incarnation, there would be no suffering and death on the cross for our salvation – no resurrection – no baptism – no body and blood at the altar broken and shed for you. Basically, without the incarnation, the entire Christian faith would be pointless.

But Christ was conceived in the Virgin Mary. He was born for you in Bethlehem. He carried you sins to the cross and there He paid the full price for your forgiveness, deliverance, peace, and salvation by His blood and life. He did die for you, and there sealed the payment for all your sins, each and every one, along with all the sins of everyone else who ever has or will live. And Jesus didn’t stay dead. He rose from the dead for you, for the proclamation of His victory over death and the devil, and to give you eternal life.

Rejoice in your Saviour today! He has come, is coming, and will come again for you. O Come, O Come Emmanuel! Amen.

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