

18 December 2011
Advent 4

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Humble Thanks and Simple Faith”

Text: Luke 1:26-38; 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Romans 16:25-27

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Christmas is the celebration of the mystery of the incarnation. Not just the birth of a man, but the birth of God. The birth of the one who is both perfect God and perfect man united in one person. Our long-promised Saviour coming into the world.

The reading from St. Luke today, however, reminds us that this all started long before Christmas. The incarnation took place beginning with the conception. When the angel Gabriel came to Mary nine months before and announced to her the astonishing news that she would be the mother of God.

Even more astonishing than that, though, is the fact that Mary does not doubt this Word of God! She is *unlike* Zechariah, who did doubt. For in response to this same Gabriel's announcement that he and his barren wife Elizabeth would have a son in their old age, Zechariah responds: *How shall I know this?* (Luke 1:18) Or, how shall I know this word will happen? How shall I know this shall be at all? But Mary does not doubt the fact that this will happen. It is God's Word, therefore it will be. And so she asks not: *How shall I know this?* but, *How will this be?*

And Gabriel, who must himself have been astonished at this Word he was so privileged to give, is more than pleased to tell her. ***The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy - the Son of God.*** It is the working of the Holy Trinity. The power of the Most High, the Father, is His Word. And that Word now, through the Holy Spirit, will come upon Mary and be made man. He who received the Godhead without a mother now receives the manhood without a father.

And He became man as we become men. Not all at once, but growing through every stage and development of life. The manhood growing, while the Godhood remained the same. All the fullness of God even in that very first cell of life! (Col 1:19) All the fullness of God united to that baby that was born and nursed and grew and died. Yes, He was a man like us in every way, except without sin. For as Gabriel said: ***the child to be born will be called holy.*** Without sin. To be our Saviour. To take our sin upon Himself.

And with that, the house and dwelling of God among men, promised to David, has come. The house and dwelling of God made not of cedar and stone, but of flesh and bone. For as we have been singing all this season: He is Immanuel, God with us.

How often are we like David, wanting to do something for God; wanting to build something great for God; whether it be a life, or a church, or a kingdom. Yet it is God who says to us at Christmas: *I am building for you*. I am doing great things **for you**. And so you are a person God has built for Himself, and this church is His building, His creation, not ours. It is all His doing, through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Through His human weakness crucified, dead, and buried; through His Divine power raised and ascended. To do this all for you. The strong become weak so that the weak be strong.

Now, like with David, our Father doesn't mind our wanting to do for Him. This is good and the working of faith. But far more important is His working for you. Or as St. Paul said: ***Now to HIM who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ.***

And that is, in fact, the gospel and preaching that strengthened Mary. She was, at first, ***greatly troubled*** - not by the angel! - but, it says, ***at the saying: "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!"*** For this was a saying, a greeting, unlike any other. This was not how God greeted Abraham or Moses or David. *Only Mary*. For something different was happening here, in little Nazareth, Galilee. And so, we are told, Mary ***tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be***. But who could figure this out? That God would choose Mary to fulfill His Word. Simple Mary. Ordinary Mary. Chosen by grace.

So Gabriel explains: God is fulfilling His promises NOW. Now is the fullness of time; just the right time. The promise made to David will now come through this child of Mary, who will not only be the Son of God and the son of Mary, but also be called the Son of David. For He will be a king who will rule forever on David's throne. *This is the Word of the Lord!* And Mary's response? *Thanks be to God!* ***Let it be to me according to your word.***

Let it be to me according to your Word. Oh, that this would be our response to God's Word always! Instead of doubting or questioning or wishing that God would have said or done things differently, to instead respond in humble thanks and say with simple faith: *Let it be to me*. For His Word I need. His forgiveness I need. His life I need. *Let it be to me according to your Word!*

Through that Word all the fullness of the God came to dwell in the body of Jesus,

even as He lived and grew in the womb of Mary. And through that Word that same God and all His gifts are given to dwell in us - for we are now the Body of Christ, His church.

And so the Word that created life in Mary now creates life in you - the Word of the Gospel, the Word of Absolution, that forgives your sin and gives you life. The Word that says to you that you have found favor with God. That God has chosen you. Simple you. Ordinary you. Chosen by grace.

And that Spirit that created life in Mary now creates life in you - the Spirit of God that comes to you through the water of Holy Baptism and creates a child of God. That though born a sinner through your human nature, you be now born from above as a saint with a divinely spiritual nature. That though in weakness you will die and be buried, so in His divine power you be also raised to life and ascend into heaven, to live there in the fellowship of God forever.

And then also the Father who sent His Son in the flesh to be your Saviour on the cross, now sends His Son in His flesh and blood to be your spiritual food and nourishment on the altar. That you be strengthened in faith and live as His child. Rejoicing in all things. Knowing that He who has done all this for you, is working great things in you. Even in suffering, even in sadness, even in trouble and pain. Even when, like Mary, you know God's Word is true and will be, but still you wonder HOW it will be? When it looks so much like it can never be.

But what, then, did Gabriel say? ***“For nothing will be impossible with God.”*** Nothing. No matter how difficult or unreasonable or far-fetched it may seem, the Word of God which conquers sin and death is able to conquer whatever challenges and obstacles and sorrows you face. If they remain, it is God's will, that He may work good through them. If they do not, that is the work of God, too. All for you.

For us, then, what can we say? ***Let it be to me according to your word.*** For those are the words of humble thanks and simple faith. Mary's faith, and our faith. And though the angel then left Mary, the Word remained. In her womb, and in her heart. And so for you. Lots of things in this world and life may come and go, but the Word will remain. In you and for you, working good, and keeping you to eternal life. That day when all the Word is finally and completely fulfilled, when there is no more ***“Let it be”*** - but only the ***it is; the I AM;*** your eternal fellowship, rest, and peace with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

He has promised. He is faithful. He has done it. *Let it be to me according to your word,* now and forever, and unto the ages of ages.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.