

I.N.I.

Fourth Sunday in Advent

Dec. 18, 2011

Luke 1:26-38

In Christ Jesus, who is God's Grace in human form, given to the world for the salvation of all of mankind, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

At our Ladies Christmas Gathering this past Tuesday we read through Luke 1:26-56 taking note of the events, actions and words of Mary as she was told that she would give birth to the Son of God. In these verses we see Mary's great faith, her compassion for others and her profession of God's undeserved love toward her and toward all of sinful mankind. It is indeed remarkable to see how this young, virgin woman reacted to this most amazing, astonishing news that she would have the Holy Spirit come upon her and implant into her womb the Son of God so that she would give birth to the God-Man Savior of all of mankind.

Unbelievable! Without a doubt! Yet the faith that was worked in Mary's heart shone brightly as she responded: **BEHOLD THE MAIDSERVANT OF THE LORD! LET IT BE TO ME ACCORDING TO YOUR WORD.**

This Advent text is filled with God's grace and favor.

Why was the angel Gabriel sent to a virgin named Mary in the somewhat despised town of Nazareth? The answer lies in God's Grace.

Why was God making good on a promise He had given to His people who had so many times turned their hearts away from Him through idolatry and immorality?

The answer again is God's Grace!

What caused Mary to believe the unbelievable message which the angel brought to her?

Once again, the answer is the Grace which God had given to her.

As we approach the celebration of our Lord's birth we, too, need to be reminded that it was God's grace, His undeserved love for us that moved Him to send His only begotten Son into this world, conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, to be our Savior.

Our theme this morning is:

A MIRACLE IS ABOUT TO HAPPEN

I: Announced by an Angel.

Six months have passed since the angel Gabriel's message to Zacharias. Now he comes on another mission with another message. This time Gabriel does not go to the holy city of Jerusalem but to a humble town in Galilee; not to a temple but to a house; not to an aged man but to a young virgin woman to reveal to this young maiden news that would change her life. Some of the greatest news the world could ever hear. Her child would be Immanuel---God in human flesh and blood. He would be the Son of the Most High, the very Son of God in human flesh and blood.

Luke tells us who the young lady is. She is an unmarried young woman, but one who is engaged to a man named Joseph, of the house of David. Luke clearly emphasizes the fact that this young lady is a virgin, repeating it twice. All of the information in this verse is important. It sets the scene for the Old Testament prophecies to be fulfilled concerning the birth of the Messiah.

But why Mary? Why not one of the hundreds if not thousands of other young virgins from the line of David? Some would answer, because Mary was the holy virgin, pure and without sin, immaculately conceived, the perfect mother for God's Son. But that is not true!

The only answer is **GRACE!** God in His undeserved love chose this one virgin, over all of the

rest.

The angel's greeting was a common one for that day, but the message was not. **REJOICE**, or simply **GREETINGS!** Literally **GRACE TO YOU!** It is both a greeting and a wish or blessing.

The angel continues... **HIGHLY FAVORED ONE, THE LORD IS WITH YOU; BLESSED ARE YOU AMONG WOMEN!** Now these are strange words. Mary was troubled, perplexed. Imagine what this young maiden thought! What's going on here? Why is this angel in my house? What is God trying to tell me by this greeting? There also was fear in her heart because she was in the presence of this holy creature of God. Mixed in with her fear and apprehension was confusion as to what the angel was saying.

HIGHLY FAVORED ONE literally reads, **ONE UPON WHOM GOD'S GRACE OR FAVOR CONTINUES TO REST.** There is certainly nothing in these words that would suggest that Mary was a dispenser of grace as taught by the Catholic church, or that she deserved this honor because of any goodness on her own. In fact, it is just the opposite. The focus is on what God has done and is doing for Mary. As a sinner, Mary too, was totally dependent upon her Lord. What comforting words for her to hear, **THE LORD IS WITH YOU! HIS GRACE, HIS FAVOR IS RESTING UPON YOU.** That can be said of all of us too! God's grace or favor is upon us, but not in this special way---for from among all women, Mary, you will be the most happy, or blessed. Why?

Listen on.

Verse 30-31 **THEN THE ANGEL SAID TO HER, DO NOT BE AFRAID, MARY, FOR YOU HAVE FOUND FAVOR WITH GOD. AND BEHOLD, YOU WILL CONCEIVE IN YOUR WOMB AND BRING FORTH A SON, AND SHALL CALL HIS NAME JESUS.**

The angel first calms Mary's fears with the beautiful words; **YOU HAVE FOUND FAVOR/ GRACE WITH GOD.** God's undeserved love is given as a free gift to the unworthy sinner. It is God's grace that removes any fear from the sinner's heart and replaces it with the assurance of sins forgiven and peace with God. Mary didn't earn God's favor, any more than we can. Paul clearly tells us in Eph. 2:8, 9 **FOR BY GRACE YOU HAVE BEEN SAVED THROUGH FAITH, AND THAT NOT OF YOURSELVES; IT IS THE GIFT OF GOD, NOT OF WORKS, LEST ANYONE SHOULD BOAST.**

BEHOLD! Look! Listen! **YOU WILL CONCEIVE IN YOUR WOMB AND BRING FORTH A SON.** There have been other miraculous births, Isaac to aged parents Abraham and Sarah, John to his aged father Zacharias and barren mother Elizabeth. But never before was there a virgin birth without a human male involved. These words are a clear fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14 **BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL CONCEIVE AND BEAR A SON.** But not just any son, this is the **SAVIOR** of the world, Immanuel, **GOD WITH US** in human flesh and blood. So why did God choose Mary to be the mother of His Son? Simply **GRACE!**

II: Promised by God.

We read verses 32-33 **HE WILL BE GREAT, AND WILL BE CALLED THE SON OF THE HIGHEST; AND THE LORD GOD WILL GIVE HIM THE THRONE OF HIS FATHER DAVID. AND HE WILL REIGN OVER THE HOUSE OF JACOB FOREVER, AND OF HIS KINGDOM THERE WILL BE NO END.**

Our overall theme for these Advent Sunday morning sermons has been

OUR KING COMES! LET US PREPARE TO RECEIVE HIM.

And from this fourth sermon text we see that

HE COMES IN POWER TO ESTABLISH HIS ETERNAL REIGN!

This baby would be a true human being born of the Virgin Mary, but also true God, Son of the Highest. He is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. Jesus is the King who rules God's Kingdom. Not a kingdom of an earthly nation, like Israel, but a kingdom of people, the believers, the real spiritual Israel--those who are sons and daughters of Abraham by faith. Paul tells us in Gal. 3:29 **AND IF YOU ARE CHRIST'S, THEN YOU ARE ABRAHAM'S SEED, AND HEIRS ACCORDING TO THE PROMISE.**

The Old Testament prophecies of David's kingdom continuing forever all speak of the spiritual rule of the Savior in the hearts of the believers. Of this Kingdom, of this Rule there shall be no end.

Jesus still sits on that throne of His father David and will continue to rule on into eternity. Even death itself cannot separate the child of God from this King's loving rule. Again Paul writes in II Tim. 4:18 **AND THE LORD WILL DELIVER ME FROM EVERY EVIL WORK AND PRESERVE ME FOR HIS HEAVENLY KINGDOM.**

This stunning announcement of the angel leaves Mary even more perplexed. We read verses 34-38: **THEN MARY SAID TO THE ANGEL, HOW CAN THIS BE, SINCE I DO NOT KNOW A MAN? AND THE ANGEL ANSWERED AND SAID TO HER, THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL COME UPON YOU, AND THE POWER OF THE HIGHEST WILL OVERSHADOW YOU; THEREFORE, ALSO THAT HOLY ONE WHO IS TO BE BORN WILL BE CALLED THE SON OF GOD. NOW INDEED, ELIZABETH YOUR RELATIVE HAS ALSO CONCEIVED A SON IN HER OLD AGE; AND THIS IS NOW THE SIXTH MONTH FOR HER WHO WAS CALLED BARREN. FOR WITH GOD NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE. THEN MARY SAID, BEHOLD THE MAIDSERVANT OF THE LORD! LET IT BE TO ME ACCORDING TO YOUR WORD. AND THE ANGEL DEPARTED FROM HER.**

Zacharias wanted a sign as an assurance that the angel's words were true. He doubted! Mary does not ask for a sign. She displays no doubt at this glorious message, but she does ask for an explanation. She is still a virgin and has not had any sexual relations with any man. How can she; how will she conceive and bear a son? What an amazing answer she receives!

In a few simple words the angel describes one of the greatest events ever to occur in this world--the Incarnation, God the Son becoming a human being; God in human flesh and blood. Mary's child will have no human father. The Holy Spirit will begin life in her through a supernatural act.

Ever since the fall of Adam and Eve into sin, people have been conceived and born in sin. By nature we are all the objects of God's wrath, deserving of death and damnation, separated from our God forever. But Mary's child would be "**THE HOLY ONE.**" The only "Holy One" ever to be born in this earth. By virtue of His virgin birth Jesus shared our humanity, but not our sinfulness. Such a perfect, holy Savior was necessary. It was this perfect **HUMAN SAVIOR** who kept the law perfectly in thought, word and deed for us, and it was this perfect **HUMAN SAVIOR** who became the object of His Father's wrath, was separated from Him and suffered and died all alone on the cross as our Substitute paying the punishment for our sins.

And it was this perfect **DIVINE SAVIOR** whose perfect life applies to all of us and it was this perfect **DIVINE SAVIOR** who was the atoning sacrifice for our sins who conquered all of our enemies. Jesus had to be both, God and Man, in one person in order to be our Savior.

Even though Mary had not asked for a sign, the angel gives her one. Her relative Elizabeth, even in her old age after being barren all of her life, has conceived and is now in her sixth month. After all **WITH GOD NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE!**

What was Mary's reaction to all of these words?

III: It was Accepted by Faith.

Mary's response showed clear evidence of God's grace in her life. **LET IT BE TO ME ACCORDING TO YOUR WORD.** Her God-given faith worked in her by God's grace through the Holy Spirit in the Word, allowed her to believe the angel's message without question and to humbly place herself under God's will as His servant. In Grace, God led Mary to accept His promise to be true.

Do we recognize God's Grace in our lives? By Grace, God already in eternity chose us to be His own, His sons and daughters. By Grace, we have been led by the Holy Spirit to acknowledge Jesus as our only Savior and King. By Grace, God has caused us to believe the unbelievable, to believe the **FOOLISHNESS OF THE GOSPEL** and know that it is the **WISDOM OF GOD.**

What is our response? **BEHOLD YOUR MAIDSERVANT! BEHOLD YOUR MANSERVANT! LET IT BE UNTO ME ACCORDING TO YOUR WORD?**

When we wonder and question **WHY** and **HOW** as to what happens in our lives, may we be led to focus on the Word of God that simply tells us to **BE STILL AND BELIEVE.** And it is that same powerful **WORD** of God that gives us the power to do so. God is in control of our salvation. He planned it, He brought it about. He is in control of all of history, of yours and of mine and He will govern it according to His will for the eternal welfare and blessings of us His children. In God's mind the answers and solutions to all of life's problems and questions are clear. For our part we are simply to focus our hearts, our attention, not on the **WHY** and **HOW** in our lives but on the **WHOM** and the **WHAT---**the Savior Jesus and His Word.

Mary lived in a world of death and disease, of poverty and ruthless power, where human life was looked upon as cheap. Yet she continued to live in hope because something extraordinary, something from God Himself was unfolding before her, happening in her and to her. She was filled with humble awe and joy.

Soon we will be celebrating, in all of its fullness, the Good News of Christmas. The Word become flesh to live among us, to share our life and to conquer its death. Today the Word comes to you and to me to give us the power to live as children of God also in a world of death and disease, of poverty and ruthless power, where human life is looked upon as cheap—to give to us the power to live as children of God confidently knowing that **WITH GOD NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE,** therefore may we all declare **WE ARE YOUR SERVANTS LORD, LET MY LIFE BE ACCORDING TO YOUR WILL AND WORD.**

Amen.