

Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 24, 2023

St. Luke 1:26-38

## **“Our Final Preparation for the Manger”**

- I. To Meet Mary.
- II. To Meet God in the Flesh.
- III. To Stand According to God’s Word.

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Dear Friends in Christ,

Well, we've arrived, the 4<sup>th</sup> and final Sunday of our traditional Advent journey. And to think, we're only hours away from Christmas Eve and the morning of Christmas Day. As I thought about the sermon I was drawn to this Word from Genesis chapter 3, words that draw us to why we're here:

Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—" therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of eternal life (Gen.3:22-24).

Banned from God over sin; just one. Forever. Do we get it? God didn't say, "Oh, dear Adam, dear Eve, I'm sorry. Maybe this was too difficult. After all, this was something you really wanted and I need to be more in tune with what you want and think. Let's try another approach, one that won't be so difficult." *What you want. What you think.* Actually, it's quite simple: "...the soul who sins (1 sin) shall die (Ez.18:4b)."

This morning we're making . . .

## OUR FINAL PREPARATION FOR THE MANGER

### I. To Meet Mary.

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be (vv.26-30).

"In the sixth month" refers to six months after, as Luke reports, "the angel said to him "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John (Lk. 1:13)." You'll remember that Elizabeth and Mary were cousins. You'll also want to remember that Mary and Joseph were both descendants of the house of David.

Concerning Gabriel's visit with Mary we're told, "and 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 bear a Son, and you shall call his name Jesus (vv.30,31)." Once again, God chooses, of all the people in the world, a nobody . . . to the world! You know, just as He chose you - and me - nobodies to be His through faith in Christ. We call that a miracle.

We'll want to remember that Mary was betrothed to Joseph. We call that engagement, but it was more to the Jews. It was tantamount to marriage. The actual marriage ceremony was set for a later date. All of this points to the virgin birth of Jesus. It takes us back to the great prophecy given through Isaiah some 700 years before Jesus walked the earth: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel (meaning God with us) (Is. 7:14)."

This prophecy found in Isaiah 7:14 then takes us back to the word God spoke to Satan concerning our first parents fall into sin: "I will put enmity (hostility) between you and the woman, between your offspring and her offspring; He (the Christ; Jesus) shall bruise your head (at Calvary) and you shall bruise his heel (at Calvary) (Gen.3:15)."

## II. To Meet God in the Flesh.

And 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 bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to 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 (vv.30-33)."

"The throne of his father David" takes us back to II Samuel 7 when God sent the prophet Nathan to David with this message; a message given around 1000 years before the birth of Jesus who is a descendant of David according to His flesh; this message: "When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish his throne forever (vv.12,13)."

This text is not about David's son, Solomon or any of the descendants of David to follow except one, the only One whose Kingdom has been established forever and will be gloriously revealed on the Last Day. This is the Kingdom that will come down from Heaven, the new Jerusalem, as John wrote in Revelation 21: "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride (that is, the church, God's people) adorned for her husband (v.2)."

And again, His name was to be and is Jesus, meaning the one who saves, rescues. The Lord Jesus would come to this earth for one very specific reason: to save us from our sin and its consequence, namely eternal separation from God. Everyone one of us lives with the awareness that everything we think can slowly work into words, sometimes very vicious, or foul. Left unchecked, words can work into deeds or actions that bring with them sorrows, regrets, sadness of life - all of which are the consequences of sin. They loom before us and convict us of our guilt. The thoughts alone are worthy of death and separation from God. However as Scripture says, "In him (our Lord Jesus Christ) we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace (Eph.1:7)." Old stuff? Never! In Christ we have been redeemed. You know: "The wages of sin is death (physical and eternal)but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rm.6:23)."

Because of Christ, God's Word promises: "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem...(Heb.12:22)." This is the eternal Kingdom. This is what God promises through Mary; again from our text: "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." Through faith in Christ's earning our forgiveness, the Kingdom is ours.

## III. To Stand According to God's Word.

And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be since I am a virgin?"

And the angel answered, "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. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing is impossible with God." And Mary said, "Behold I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according your word." And the angel departed from her (vv.34-38).

"For nothing is impossible with God." Nothing. There are two sad misunderstandings of that statement. The first is the one that gets angry or frustrated with God because He doesn't do what we want or think He should do. The fallen nature quickly pushes aside this Word God gave to Moses: "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the revealed things belong to us and our children forever, that we may do the words of this law (Dt.29:29)." He doesn't owe us an explanation of anything. He didn't sin against us! We sinned and sin against Him! Most church people have little or no knowledge of the Word!

The second is rejecting that God can do whatever He wills. For example, the thinking that He doesn't really give us His body and blood in His Supper, or that the littlest ones can't repent or believe. Listen: Jesus said "This **is** my body. This **is** my blood." And Jesus said, "but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin...(Mt. 18:6a)." The Greek word here for "believe" is the same word used in John 3:16, "whoever believes in me should not perish but have eternal life (Jn.3:16)" Please listen to these words of Luther:

As it happened to Mary with her faith, so it happens to all of us, that we must believe what is opposed to our understanding, thoughts, experience, and example. For what that is the property and nature of faith, that it will not permit anything to stand outside of itself, on which a person might rely and rest but only the mere Word of God and the divine promise. (Kretzmann, New Testament, Vol. I, p.265).

And so it is that Mary responds with, "Behold I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And it is the Word that prepares us to meet at the Manger; to behold the birth of God in the flesh whose blood would wash away our sin and grants us eternal life!

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott