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Advent 4

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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"The Angel Gabriel From Heaven Came"
Text: Luke 1:26-38

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

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God.

For this moment the angels had been waiting. Ever since the fall of man into sin. Ever since they were sent to guard the entrance to Eden and the Tree of Life. Ever since God promised to send a Saviour. God knew the time appointed, but they did not. And so when God called Gabriel to Himself and gave him the news to deliver, what joy there must have been among the angels! The time had come, and Gabriel was the appointed messenger.

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.

Not to Jerusalem, but to Nazareth, was Gabriel sent. And not to the daughter of a king or priest, but to an unmarried virgin engaged to a carpenter who was a descendant of David. Which is appropriate, since God was now beginning to *build* the house He had promised David. And the cornerstone would be the stone the builders rejected (Mt 21:42) - and so not to be found in Jerusalem, but in little Nazareth. And so to Nazareth Gabriel descends, to a carefully chosen virgin, ***by the name of 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 . . .

Mary was troubled - not at the *appearance* of Gabriel (for perhaps he didn't look like an angel, but like a man) - but at his *words*. For he didn't simply say "Greetings" or "Howdy" - but really, **"Rejoice!"** Rejoice, because she is the favored one. Favored by the Lord, and the Lord is with her. But she is lowly, she is simple, she is *nothing*. Why should she be noticed at all, let alone favored? And so she has trouble grasping what is being said to her. But Gabriel is undeterred. He faithfully and patiently - although probably about ready to burst with joy! - delivers the message he has been entrusted with.

“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.”

A more amazing paragraph I don't think has ever been written. A virgin will conceive without knowing a man, and bear a son. And a true son of Mary's he will be. Flesh of her flesh. A human being exactly as she is a human being. A boy who grows and eats and sleeps and breathes and does everything else a human being does. And yet this boy that will lie in her arms and nurse at her breast will be the Son of the Most High God. The One who made and rules all things. The One who was before all things. The One whom all the angels worship. She is going to be not just the mother of a baby boy, but the mother of God.

And what will this one do, this one who will be named Jesus? He will fulfill the promises made to David and Jacob, restore the people of God, and reign over them forever. *Forever, Mary!* Do you know what that means? That both He and the ones He rules over **will live forever**. It will be a kingdom that death cannot touch, Mary! For this one to be born of you will destroy death and cover, atone for, and pardon the sins that separate the human race from the all-holy Father. He will do it, Mary, for you, for all people. You do not know how yet, but that is best for now. But the day will come when you will stand on a darkened hill and see a sight of love so grievous that it will tear your soul in two. But it will be his love for you and for all people that drives him there, and that will keep him on that cross. We'll call that day "Good" though it will look anything but.

But worry yourself not about that yet, Mary. Now is the time for rejoicing. You are the one, the chosen one, the favored one, to be the mother of the Saviour. . . . I wonder how big was Gabriel's smile to utter those wonderful words?

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

Note well - Mary says not: how can this be (in doubt), but how will this be? Faith believes, though there seems to be no small obstacle to her conceiving.

And the angel answered 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.”

The Spirit that hovered over the waters at creation and gave life, will do so again, in Mary. And conceived of the Holy One, the Spirit, this child will be holy - pure and

sinless. For a sinless, spotless Lamb is required to atone for sin. And so the Life of the World will begin His life in Mary's womb.

“For, Mary, nothing will be impossible with God.”

Actually what Gabriel said there was that *“no Word of God is without power.”* It is not possible for any Word of God to fail. And so the Word that brought forth all life at creation, will also bring forth life in your womb, Mary.

Yet not only in Mary's womb, but when this boy learns to talk and begins to speak and proclaims the Word of God, what His words will do! His Word will heal the sick and raise the dead. They will bless and they will comfort. They will give faith and forgive sins. They will make water the vehicle of the Holy Spirit, and bread and wine His very body and blood. His Word will always accomplish that for which it was sent. (Is 55:10-11) Always. Then, now, and for the generations to come. Whether spoken by Jesus, angels, apostles, pastors, or you.

And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.”

Yes, Mary is the servant of the Lord. But the greater servant is the One now conceived in her womb - by Word and Spirit. This Jesus, who has come to serve her and all people. To take our humanity as His own; to take our sin and lay down His life for the life of the world. It is according to His Word of promise, made in the beginning, and the Word of His promise fulfilled, spoken by Gabriel.

And so it is also with us - we who like Mary are lowly, simple, nothing, not deserving to be noticed by God at all. Yet we are not only noticed, but favored. For in our hearts faith has been conceived by the same Word and Spirit of God. And so as Mary has spoken, let us also speak: ***“let it be to me according to your Word.”*** The Word that says your sins are forgiven, and they are. The Word that says you are my son, my daughter, and you are. The Word that says take eat, take drink, and you do - the very body and blood of Jesus. And the Word that on the last day will enter your ears and say “arise!” - and you will. To life eternal. In His everlasting kingdom. At the foot of His throne. Where sin and death and sadness are no more. Where the One who was once embraced by Mary, will then embrace you.

The time has come!

And the angel departed from her.

Yes, he departed, but the separation is only temporary. For they will meet again, as will we, as we together bow before this Child born of Mary, and worship Him in

eternal joy. The farewells we speak in sadness now, will be overshadowed by the joy of His welcome then, when all who have trusted in this Child reunite in Him.

So Gabriel departs - his message delivered, his job complete. But now with us is Immanuel - God Himself with us. And *He* has promised us: ***“Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*** (Mt 28:20) He has come to never depart. To be with us through thick and thin, until the end of this age, that we may be with Him into the ages forever. And so He comes - to Mary, to us. The Word is fulfilled. The Word is made flesh!

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

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

(Many of the thoughts, words, and phrases in this sermon taken from the research and writing of Rev. William Weedon, as found in Concordia Pulpit Resources, Vol. 19, Part 1, pp. 17-18)