

5 December 2018
Advent 1 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“The Time Has Come”

Text: Luke 1:5-24a; Genesis 3:22-24

The time has come, the Lord said to me. I couldn't believe my ears! If I had a heart it would have jumped for joy! But I am an angel. Gabriel, is what God named me. I serve at His pleasure.

And we do serve, me and the other angels. You wouldn't believe how much. You don't know we're there, you can't see us, but we're fighting for you all the time. Because my former brother is fighting against you all the time. Satan is the name he is now known by. Or the devil. And he is. He used to be one of us, serving the Lord. But he fell away. Rebelled. The great mutiny is what we call it here. And he took a third of my brothers with him. That was such a sad day. When we had to fight those we used to serve with and they were kicked out of heaven, now to make war on the earth. Against you. And if it wasn't for us fighting for you . . . well, you don't want to know what would happen if we weren't fighting for you.

But I have to tell you - as sad as that day was, there was an even sadder day for us: when our Father stationed us on guard duty, to guard the tree of life. You see, our now-evil-brother deceived Eve into eating that fruit - that fruit our Father told Adam, and Adam told Eve, not to eat. And then Adam ate it, too. Our Father still loved them, His children, but they could no longer be allowed to eat from the tree of life. Because of what they had done, because of their sin, it was not good for them to do so. And so our Father sent us to guard the way to it. We obeyed, of course. We're warriors and it was easy duty. But sad. Sad because of what our evil brother had done to you.

But on that day the Lord posted us on guard duty, we also heard Him speak: a promise. To undo what His children had done. They plunged the world into sin, and He would get them out of sin. He would send a Saviour. It would be His own Son!

But I'm getting ahead of myself. That part of the story comes later.

First, our Father said He was going to send a prophet to prepare the way for His Son. To get people ready for His coming. To point to Him and proclaim Him to the world. Someone *in the spirit and power of Elijah*, that great Old Testament prophet. He would call people to repentance. He would proclaim forgiveness. He would *make ready for the Lord a people prepared*.

And now, *the time has come*, He said to us! It had been such a long time! Well, for you, of course. We don't have time on this side of eternity. That's something God created for you, to help you. But we spend so much time with you, fighting for you and helping you, we kind of get a sense of it, too. And in your time it had been a long time. But that's okay. Because it was now just the right time. For our Father always does things at just the right time.

So the time has come, He said! I feel joy even after all these years whenever I just think about those words! It was such a great and awesome day. And that He picked me, Gabriel, to bring this news to you.

Go, He said, to a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. You'll find him in the Temple. He was chosen to burn the incense this day and lead the people in prayer. I knew of him. Our Father had used me to help and fight for him before - though he, of course, did not know it. And his wife Elizabeth, too. You know, I always had a sense that our Father was going to use them for something special. Was he ever! They were old now, and Elizabeth was barren, unable to have children. But that was of no concern to me. I knew that was no obstacle for our Father. Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah 90 when God fulfilled His promise to them and gave them their son Isaac. Hannah was barren, and yet God opened her womb to have Samuel, and then other children after that. No, our Father was able to do this. Of that I had no doubt!

But old Zechariah . . . he wasn't so sure. He had doubts. I went to the Temple that day, just as our Father told me. I wasted no time! As soon as He spoke, I obeyed, like all good and faithful soldiers. And I found old Zechariah just as He said I would, offering the incense there. When I appeared to him, he was troubled and afraid of me. That's what sin has done to you - made you afraid of us. But I told 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.*** Those were my exact words. I remember them as if it were yesterday. For I don't think I'll ever forget that day. I told him more, too, about this son he would have. How he was going to be the forerunner of God's promised Saviour!

But as I said, Zechariah didn't believe me at first. He had doubts. It wasn't me he was doubting, though - it was the Word of God. That our Father could do this Word that He had sent me to speak. It wasn't the first time. That's another thing sin has done to you all - it has made you afraid of us, and it makes you doubt our Father's Word. That's been your history for a very long time! You don't realize how foolish that is! It's like doubting that water is wet, or that fire is hot. When God speak, it happens. Like in the beginning, when our Father created all things. He spoke, and it came to be. Light, worlds, heaven and earth, plants, animals. Do you think this is harder than that? But sin has messed you up big time. You don't think right anymore. That's why our Father was now sending His Son - to fix it. To fix you.

Well, our Father had told me this would happen. So I knew exactly what to say in answer to Zechariah. If he didn't believe the Word of God spoken to him, then he himself would be unable to speak until the child was born. It is our Father who gives all things - even the ability for you to speak. And this He would take away from Zechariah. That's how you'll know, old man. It didn't give me any pleasure speaking those words to him, but it couldn't lessen the joy in my heart - if I had a heart! - that the time had now come for your Saviour to come.

So I vanished from Zechariah's sight, but I was still there, watching. He finished his service in the Temple, finished offering the incense, and he turned to leave. I don't know how long we had been there, for as I said, time doesn't effect us angels! But apparently it had been some time, an unusual amount of time, for the people were worried that something had happened to Zechariah. He opened his mouth to tell them, but no words came out. He couldn't speak, of course. He began trying to tell them with signs, and he was able to communicate a little, for the people thought the reason for his delay was that *he had seen a vision in the temple*. Not really. He saw me, Gabriel - angel, soldier, messenger, of our Father. Serving you faithfully from the very beginning.

Zechariah went home and tried to live normally. But when our Father picks you for service, normal is not a word that will describe you anymore. And just as our Father spoke, so His Word did: *Elizabeth conceived* a son. Oh, how Zechariah wanted to tell everyone he was going to have a son! You know how it is, when couples get pregnant and want to tell the world. But he couldn't. A reminder to him of his doubt and unbelief. But he would be able, I knew. Later. Once his son was born.

So the plan was now set in motion! The day we angels had been looking forward to for so long. We hadn't had to guard the tree of life for a long time - ever since it had been destroyed by the flood. But we had still been fighting for you, for our once brother-in-arms and his horde had still been fighting against you. But the forerunner had now come, and I knew what that meant - the one coming after him, the one whose way he would prepare, was coming too! And soon.

Oh, what joy when we see our Father work His good! I hope you realize it too. And believe His Word. Because as we angels know, there is nothing more sure in all creation than His Word. So signing off, with His Name, which our Father told you in His Word: In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.