

25 March 2007
Lent 5 and
The Annunciation of our Lord

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Quietly and Suddenly”

Text: Luke 1:26-38 (Isaiah 7:10-14; Hebrews 10:4-10)

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

Today we are distracted (a bit) from our Lenten meditation, but that we might understand it better.

Today our attention is (just for a moment) taken off the cross, but that we might see it in a new light.

Today we remember that our salvation includes more than just the three days that come at the end of Lent each year. (Important as they are!)

For today, exactly nine months before Christmas, we remember the Annunciation of our Lord. That day when by the Word and Spirit of God, the Son of God (as we confessed in the Nicene Creed) **for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary and was made man.**

For while we celebrate Jesus' birth at Christmas, the real action took place that day in Nazareth. The town which was proverbial for having nothing good come out of it (Jn 1:46), but which becomes home to the only One who *is* good, God Himself. And it happens so **quietly and suddenly**. No fanfare. Only one angel, not multitudes. No shepherds or wise men. No town bustling with people and inns with no vacancies. In fact, no one else noticed anything different that day - *that day that changed everything*. There was just an announcement to a startled young girl, who amazingly agrees! *Let it be to me as you have said*. And it is done.

And so *today* is the day on which God proved that, in spite of our continual rebellion against Him, He loves us. That He is not ashamed of us, but becomes one

of us. And by so doing not changing Himself, but changing us, forever. **Quietly and suddenly.** Just as He told King Ahaz, as we heard from Isaiah. King Ahaz, who on the eve of war *needed* a sign (although he would not *ask* for one!) that God was with them, and would not abandon them, and would be faithful to them and deliver them.

And the sign? Why, a baby would be born. The sign would not be some victorious battle or an amazing angelic wiping out of the enemy! (Signs that Ahaz would undoubtedly have picked had he taken God up on His offer.) No, the sign would be a baby. A *miraculous* baby. Which, after hearing this, Ahaz probably thought “*Big deal!*” and went back to planning for war, against the thousands of soldiers on his doorstep.

But yes! It *is* a big deal! For while a baby doesn't seem much good against:

an army gathered on your doorstep,

or against the problems and difficulties of your life,

or against a nation steeped in abortion,

and against a world hellbent on pleasuring itself to death –

it *is* a big deal, when you remember that, as St. Paul wrote: *we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.* (Eph 6:12)

You see, Ahaz, the problem wasn't the army on your doorstep, it was your faith. Faith blind to the working of God.

Faith mistrustful of the working of God.

Faith which even scoffed at the working of God.

And that's our problem, too, isn't it? Against the problems in our lives, our church, our nation, our world which seem too big for a baby to handle! Don't we need some big, victorious battle, or an amazing angelic wiping out of the enemy!

No. Instead God would enter the battle **quietly and suddenly.** For against such an army, only a baby would do. Only a baby could do it. A miraculous baby. Born without sin. To show us the power of God. To show us the *love* of God.

For all there is to know about God is found in Jesus Christ. It is not the posting of the Ten Commandments on the walls of schools and government buildings that will

make us a Christian nation. That might make us more moral, but not Christian. To do that we would have to post pictures of Jesus in the arms of Mary. The baby. For though God gave laws, He is not a law-giver. He is a Saviour.

And today, we remember, He enters the fray, **quietly and suddenly**, and unites Himself to us. A union not temporary – just to perform a certain deed. But forever. That we be bound to Him and He to us. *And what God has joined together, let no man put asunder.*

For you see, there is this mistaken notion that God took on our human flesh only as long as He had to, and then discarded it when He was done with it. Shedding it at the first possible moment – like taking off an uncomfortable necktie for you men, or pantyhose for you women, or collars for us pastors. Something we wear only when we have to!

But that's *not* our Saviour. There's no love there, only obligation. And if He took us only temporarily, like conditional marriage vows, how could we ever be sure? How could we ever be secure? How could we ever know if He *really* loves us? No, that simply won't do.

And so it's time we realize that the annunciation was not just a great day *for us*, it was a great day for God also! That the incarnation is something God *really wanted to do!* (If we can speak in those terms.) That He became man so that God and man could live together forever. As one flesh. Jesus didn't just take on human flesh to die, although that was part of it. But if for that reason *only*, why bother with being born, and growing, and learning, and all that stuff He did until He was 30 years old or so? He could have just appeared on the scene in an *adult* body; which would have done just as well, if all He had to do was die with it.

But no. He has come to join us to Himself. Everyone of us, every part of us. From the moment we are one-celled boys or girls in our mother's womb, through birth, and every stage of our life. No person can say Jesus was not like me. The still born child, the miscarried child, the aborted child, the toddler, the youth, the teenager, the adult. Jesus embraced us all in our humanity, uniting us to God in Himself, one flesh, once and for all.

For Jesus didn't just *use* us and our flesh, but became us, that joining us to Him, what He did, we did. And so in Him you are victorious. In Him you have already died to sin, descended into hell, disarmed Satan, risen from the dead, and ascended into Heaven! For if when Adam sinned we all sinned, then also all that Christ (the second Adam) did we did. Or as we heard in the reading from Hebrews: *He abolishes the first in order to establish the second.* And so while Adam stripped man of His dignity, of His godly image, and made us like the animals, today Jesus gives man back His dignity, His godly image, and makes us sons of the Father.

And He does it **quietly and suddenly**. Beginning in a conception, a new life cradled and taking haven in a virgin's womb . . . then in a baby born, crying and taking haven in His mother's arms . . . and culminating in a man dying on a cross, crying out and taking haven in His Father's hands (Lk 23:46). For you.

And so it is, now, for you and I.

A baby is baptized, **quietly and suddenly**. Big deal?

A sinner is absolved, **quietly and suddenly**. Big deal?

Folks young and old come to this table to eat and drink the body and blood of Jesus, **quietly and suddenly**. Big deal?

Yes, *big deal!* For the Word and Spirit of God, joined to water, words, and bread and wine, join us to Jesus in His death and resurrection;

join us to Jesus in forgiveness, life, and love;

join us to Jesus, restoring in us the image of God.

And cradling us in the love of our Triune God.

Giving us His work for us, **quietly and suddenly**, faithfully and deliberately, to one baby, one person, at a time.

And so also **in your life**. The **quietly and suddenly** of the Word and Spirit of God, working in you and working through you. In your prayers. In your good works. In your forgiving. Done in faith. Big deal? Yes, *big deal!* Maybe not the big, victorious battle, or the amazing angelic wiping out that many are looking for – *but even better*. For these are the *let it be done to me as you have said* responses of faith from you and me. The amazing agreement from those to whom the Word and Spirit of God have come.

A life of faith, one person, one baby, at a time.

A life of faith, begun in the new birth of baptism . . . taking haven in the arms of the church . . . and then at the last, crying out and taking haven in our Father's hands.

A life of faith, that as we now enter these last two weeks of Lent, when we look at the cross, we see not only our Saviour, but our brother. And know that because of Him, we are no longer slaves to sin, but Sons of God.

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.

[Some of the thoughts and phrases in this sermon taken from Rev. Dr. David Scaer, *In Christ: The Selected Works of David P. Scaer, Lutheran Confessor, Vol. 1: Sermons* © 2004 Concordia Catechetical Academy, 296-307]