

24 December 2017  
Advent 4

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church

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“The Culmination of History”

Text: 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Luke 1:26-38

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

The angel Gabriel spoke to Mary. Not just of a baby, but of the culmination of history.

Is that saying too much? Not from a Christian point of view.

From the point of view that history has a life of its own, that the world - and us - can do what we want, that religion is just something that comes and goes and doesn't really have anything to do with the real world, then yes, that is saying too much.

But as Christians who believe in a God who created this world, and is active in this world, and who promised to redeem this world, and then worked toward that redemption from the very moment we plunged it into sin and ruined it all - then no, not too much.

In fact, it is exactly right.

For the truth is that God was working all things for *this moment* - when He would send His Son into the world to redeem it. When He would send His angel Gabriel to announce this fact to Mary.

Now that doesn't mean that everything that happens is scripted by God and we have no choice - that we're like robots or marionettes. We do make choices. Sometimes bad ones. We sin. We mess up. And that's not on God, that's on us.

But to say that God was working all things for this moment is to emphasize the importance of this birth, and how God was working in history - using us and our choices, our sins and our successes - toward this day. The sending of His Son into His creation, to save us from sin, death, and the devil.

Now, we may not understand that exactly - there's so much that has happened throughout history, right? How can it all be for *this*? This seemingly insignificant birth that hardly anybody noticed when it *did* happen? How could things that happened half a world away have anything to do with this? Surely, not ALL of history has to do with this!

Well, just because we can't understand it doesn't mean those things didn't - just that our minds are too small and too limited to understand it. That maybe we're not as smart as we think we are.

AND, it seems to me, that if we allow that, if we allow that this birth was just a blip in history and that all the stuff happening in the world up to this point had nothing to do with this, then we must say this, too: that's true for what happened *after* as well. That this birth really has nothing to do with the 2000 years that has come since.

But it simply is not so. And you know who knows that better than we? Satan. Who tried to derail this birth ever since the moment God promised it, and who is still trying to derail its meaning for us today. Belittling it, mythologizing it, marginalizing it, trying to make it irrelevant.

And he's been able to do a pretty good job of late, hasn't he? For many, Christmas without Jesus isn't the exception, it's the rule. Christmas instead is about love, not incarnation. About buying, not redemption. And go to church on Christmas?! But that's family time! And even when Jesus is in Christmas, he's just part of it. Half? Less?

But not so for Mary. When she uttered those words in response to God's message through Gabriel, ***Let it be to me according to your word***, she was all in. Christmas wasn't just part of her life, it would be her life, from this moment on. For the next nine months, for the next thirty-some years, and then for however long she lived after that. Christmas changed her world.

And it's time for us to realize it, too. That Christmas changed our world. Not just for a month or so, but forever. That what God wants is not for history to turn out this way or that, for this team or that to win, or for your life to turn out exactly as you wanted and planned. What God wants is for His Son to be born in human flesh, and for His Son to be born in you. That you have a life that will withstand the twists and turns of history, and a life redeemed from the curse of sin and death - a life that transcends all that. Because it's His life, given to you. And therefore a life that you live now and will live forever.

And if that's what God wants, that's what He is working toward. For you and for all people.

Which may mean that life doesn't turn out as you planned. David had great plans, which we heard about in the Old Testament reading from Samuel. Israel was at peace, he had just built himself a big, beautiful palace, and now he wanted to build God a big, beautiful house, too. What's wrong with that?

Well, nothing, really. Except that's not what God was interested in. He was happy to dwell with His people in a tent. So, no, He tells David, ***I'm going to make you a house***.

Not the kind of stone and cedar, which will eventually crumble; but one that *will be established forever*. One that will never end. One that neither sin nor time will be able to touch.

That's the house Luke refers to when he tells us the story of Gabriel and Mary, when he says that *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 then Gabriel spoke of it, too, when he said: *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*.

Or in other words, with this child, God was fulfilling His Word and building David a house that would last forever. A house that sin could not crumble, death could not stop, and the devil could not conquer. They all would try, but they would all fail. And when Jesus rose from the dead, the cornerstone of that house was laid - for all time. The dwelling of God was with men, that the dwelling of men might be with God.

Which brings us to you. A lot of history has passed before you came along, and there may be a lot more still to come - or not. But the house that God build for David, a kingdom that will never end, a kingdom free from sin, death, and evil, through the birth, life, death, and resurrection of His Son, **is a house for you**. For you to live in now and forever. Baptized into Christ you are a member in this house, this family. And God has been working for you - in ways that you perhaps know, and in ways you know not - and He will not stop.

Now maybe, like David, you have great plans. But maybe God is going to make your history go in a bit of a different direction. Not because He hates you, but because He is building for you and in you and through you.

Mary's plans certainly went off in a whole new direction. And, we could say, a pretty rough direction. A pregnancy before marriage, a birth away from home, fleeing to a foreign country, then back home only to see her son hung up on a cross. God was building a house? Really? It seemed more like a nightmare.

But it was not. It was all according to plan. It happened at just the right time (Galatians 4:4). The culmination of history. Maybe like an hourglass. All of history leading up to this, and all of history now flowing from this. This birth. The Son of God in human flesh.

And your history, too. For just as the Holy Spirit came through the Word spoken by Gabriel and conceived a baby in Mary's womb, so the Holy Spirit comes through the Word spoken here - the word connected to the water of baptism, the word of the Absolution, the word of the Gospel - to conceive faith in your heart. That you be born into the house of God, a child of God. And live in that house not for a while, but forever.

That no matter what happens in your history - what comes or goes, what is given to you or taken from you - this remain: your life in Christ.

So now we will come and be fed by our Father in His house, to give us the nourishment that we need. Not earthly food, but heavenly food. The bread that came down from heaven and was born in Bethlehem - a name which means, by the way, *house of bread*.

And tonight we will gather again here to hear of His birth again. We'll sing the carols and hymns we love and know by heart. We hear of the shepherds and the angels and the manger. And for a moment, this birth will again be at the center - of our attention, of our lives, of history. Where it belongs. And I pray that like with Mary, it change your world, how you view the world, and see the hand of God at work in your life.

For Christmas is not just a birthday - but as we will sing, *A Great and Mighty Wonder* (LSB #383). The Word of God fulfilled. The Word of God made flesh. The Word of God born for you.

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.