

Sermon for The Third Sunday in Advent

Date: December 14, 2019 (Saturday)

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

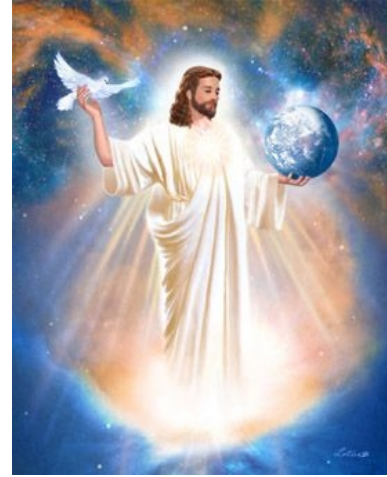
Old Testament: 2 Samuel 7:12-16

Epistle Reading: Romans 16:25-27

Gospel Reading: Luke 1:26-36; 2:1-20

Sermon Text: Luke 1:26-36; 2:1-20

Sermon Title: Who is Jesus?



Hymns:

LSB 345 – Hark! A Thrilling Voice is Sounding

LSB 349 – Hark the Glad Sound

LSB 357 – O come, O Come, Emanuel (v.5,1)

In This Advent

LSB 813 – Rejoice, O Pilgrim Throng (v.1,4,7)

LSB 350 – Come, Thou Precious Ransom, Come

O Holy, Holy, Holy Lord

O Christ, the Holy Lamb of God

Lord, Let Your Servant Go in Peace

LSB 803 – Joyful, Joyful, We Adore thee

Distribution:

LSB 849 – Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness

Liturgy:

Divine Service: Creative Worship



Pastor James Groleau
St. John's Lutheran Church
1200 13th Avenue NW
Austin, MN 55912
Office: (507) 433-2642
Shepherd@JamesPlace.net
StJohnsAustinLCMS.org
FaceBook.com/StJohnsAustin
Twitter.com@StJohnsAustinMN
FaceBook.com/Shepherd.James.Groleau
KAUS 1480 AM Sun. 9:00am



Text: Luke 1:26–36; 2:1–20

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. 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."

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

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. 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.

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

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Grace to you, and peace, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Today we're going to look at the account of Jesus' birth in Luke. In Luke's record of the events he gives a more detailed account than Matthew, the only other record of Jesus' birth. Luke probably has more details because we presume he was given the time to sit down and talk with Mary. She was able to give him meticulous details of the events, and how she felt when they occurred. So let's delve into these things and see what we can learn.

Luke 1:26 reads:

Six months after Elizabeth [*John the Baptist's mother*] had become pregnant, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a city in Galilee. The angel went to a virgin promised in marriage to a descendant of David named Joseph. The virgin's name was Mary.

Here we learn that John the Baptist was only six months older than Jesus. We also learn that the honored holy angel Gabriel is the one sent to greet Mary, and to tell her God's plan. It goes on to say:

When the angel entered her home, he greeted her and said, "You are favored by the Lord! The Lord is with you."

She was startled by what the angel said and tried to figure out what this greeting meant.

The angel told her, "Do not be afraid, Mary. You have found favor with God. You will become pregnant, give birth to a son, and name him Jesus. He will be a great man and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. Your son will be king of Jacob's people forever, and his kingdom will never end."

God had sent prophets throughout the ages of time to repeat the promise. The promise given first to Adam and Eve, then down through the generations to finally to Mary and Joseph. As the time grew near more and more details were given about the coming Messiah. One is that He would sit on David's throne forever. His kingdom would never, ever, end.

From Mary's perspective that had to appear nearly impossible. Rome was in control. Herod, an Edomite, an enemy of Israel, was sitting on the throne of David.

He had been placed there by Rome. No descendant of Israel had sat on David's throne for some time. How could David's throne last forever? How could a very poor young girl from a no name family, in a no name town, give birth to the eternal King and Messiah of Israel?

There is another reason Mary couldn't image how this could become true. Look at verse 34.

Mary asked the angel, "How can this be? Since I am a virgin?"

The angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come to you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the Holy Child developing inside you will be called the Son of God."

The angel answers Mary with comforting words of explanation, and then further proof in verse 36.

"Elizabeth, your relative, is six months pregnant with a son in her old age. People said she couldn't have a child, but nothing is impossible for God."

There is God's answer. "Nothing is impossible for God." Mary is a faithful, obedient, devout, young woman. When Gabriel says, 'this is God's Word' she believes even though she questions. She accepts these things as truth even though she cannot understand them. Her reply in verse 38 is:

Mary answered, "I am the Lord's servant. Let everything you have said happen to me." Then the angel left her.

So far Luke has shown us how God blesses people according to His own will and way. He did not choose the rich and powerful, He chose the poor, those with nothing. Luke has given us a small glimpse into the spiritual world and the events in Heaven. There is not much there. As is almost always true in Scripture there's not much information concerning these things and we are left with all sorts of questions that we simply will not be able to answer until Heaven is our home. Until then, like Mary, we should humbly submit to God our Father and trust Him.

Luke then goes back to John the Baptist and his birth. We will skip over that and move onto Luke 2:1.

At that time the Emperor Augustus ordered a census of the Roman Empire. This was the first census taken while

Quirinius was governor of Syria. All the people went to register in the cities where their ancestors had lived.

Here is a unique singularity of Holy Scripture. Those words set the Bible apart from any other so called holy book, of any other religion in the world. Not one, not one, provides names, places, and events. These are names, places, and events that are recorded, not only in the Bible but, in secular documents from that same time. We can pin-point to within less than a year when these things took place because they are corroborated by other secular documents, written by people, many of whom were hostile toward Christianity.

Continuing at verse 4.

So Joseph went from Nazareth, a city in Galilee, to a Judean city called Bethlehem. Joseph, a descendant of King David, went to Bethlehem because David had been born there. Joseph went there to register with Mary. She had been promised to him in marriage and was pregnant.

Bethlehem is an ancient little town. It's name means, 'House of Bread.' It is there that the very Bread of Life, Jesus Christ is born. Hundreds of years before Jesus was born the prophet Micah (*chapter 5*) wrote:

You, Bethlehem Ephrathah, are too small to be included among Judah's cities. Yet, from you Israel's future ruler will come for me. His origins go back to the distant past, to days long ago. That is why the LORD will abandon Israel until the time a mother has a child. Then the rest of the LORD's people will return to the people of Israel. The child will become the shepherd of his flock. He will lead them with the strength of the LORD, with the majestic name of the LORD his God. They will live in safety because his greatness will reach the ends of the earth. He will be their peace.

Do you see God's hand in all things? Even pagan rulers, willingly or unwillingly, must conform to God's providence and provision. God truly does work all things for good to those who love Him.¹ Joseph lived in Nazareth but now he must travel to Bethlehem. Thus fulfilling the prophecy.

While they were in Bethlehem the time came for Mary to have her child. She gave birth to her firstborn son. She

1 Romans 8:28

wrapped him in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn.²

Mary and Joseph had traveled the 80 or so miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem. The movies always have Mary on a donkey. The more probable truth is they could not have afforded such a luxury. There are a number of things in the account of Jesus' young life that point to Mary and Joseph being very poor. Mary, eight months pregnant, had to walk the 80 miles, sleeping on the side of the road with probably nothing more than a cloak to use as a blanket.

When they get to Bethlehem there is no room in the inn. Bethlehem was a very small town. There was probably one inn, more likely something closer to a bed and breakfast. It would have filled up fast as people poured into town. The movies always have the innkeepers wife directing them to the stable, but it doesn't really say that in the Bible.

What is far more likely is that Joseph would have traveled to the house of a relative in Bethlehem. There the house may have already been full as well, so they would have been given a room that was constructed like a porch. There the animals were fed and watered through the Winter months. It far more likely being early Spring, the animals were out in the pastures with the shepherds. It is very probable that Joseph's family was there, and that Mary and Joseph weren't alone in the cold, out in the middle of a field.

There is actually a great deal of archaeological, and documented accounts, to support this. It's not quite as romantic and nostalgic. It was still difficult, cold, and not the kind of place you'd want to bring the Son of the Most High God into the world.

Mary and Joseph had to be wondering what God thought of them, and how they were managing the events over which God had given them charge. You would presume they might have been thinking, 'what was God thinking, putting us in charge of this?' Still they were faithful and obedient, and they did what they could with what they had, and with what God provided. There is the lesson for us. When things don't go as planned, accept that God has a plan.

Now again Luke gives us more details. He continues in verse 8

Shepherds were in the fields near Bethlehem. They were taking turns watching their flock during the night. An angel from the Lord suddenly appeared to them. The

2 Luke 2:6-7

glory of the Lord filled the area with light, and they were terrified.

The angel said to them, “Do not be afraid! I have good news for you, a message that will fill everyone with joy. Today your Savior, Christ the Lord, was born in the city of David.

This is how you will recognize him: You will find an infant wrapped in strips of cloth, and lying in a manger.”

I have sometimes mentioned that Jesus was probably born closer to the time we celebrate Easter. We actually don't know the day Jesus was born, because the ancient Church never celebrated Jesus' birth. For them everything was about Easter. In the Christian Church every Sunday is a celebration and remembrance of Easter, not Christmas. Christmas is a relatively new idea.

The oldest reference to Christmas in the Christian Church is the year 366 when a bishop in Rome recognized it.³ It was in the early 600's⁴ that the next reference is ever made. Celebrating Christmas is really an invention of the European Christian Church, probably starting in the 700-800A.D.

As an aside:

When you look on the Internet you will run into all sorts of references to Christians stealing the Winter Solstice, and changing it to something 'Christian-ee.'

First, as with most claims of the Christian faith being built on borrowing pagan ideas, there's no evidence, neither through archaeology, nor ancient documents, to back up that claim. It is simply someone's imagination or guess.

Second, it's not a very good guess because no one in all the recorded history of humankind ever celebrate the Winter Solstice on December 25. It is days earlier on December 21.

Third, there is almost no reference to anyone celebrating the Winter Solstice throughout all of human history.

Fourth, the Church Year does not start on December 25, but rather November 30 with the season we are now in, Advent.

3 *The Archeology of the New Testament: The Life of Jesus and the Beginning of the Early Church*, ©1992, Princeton University Press, p. 46

4 *470 Births: Dionysius Exiguus*, ©2010, Book Group LLC

It is the History Channel® and Discovery Channel® that are telling you the pixie-tales and fairy-stories, not the Church. It is they who cannot backup their claims.

Now getting back to Jesus' birth. The angels came to announce it. Why were they not sent to the palace or the Temple? Why did God send the angels to the shepherds? You need to understand something about shepherds in those days. They were kind of like used car salesmen, or shady auto mechanics of our day. Most of them you would not invite into your house. They were not trustworthy. They were known for their shady dealing with money. If you found a good one you did everything you could to keep him around. So why did God send the angels to them?

Because God is desperate to save us all. As Jesus put it:

“Healthy people don't need a doctor; those who are sick do. I've come to call sinners to change the way they think and act, not to call people who think they have God's approval.⁵”

The arrogant and self-righteous, those who think they have the answers, those who think they are the example to follow, will be brought down. The humble will be lifted up.

Where was the first Christmas celebrated? In Heaven. That celebration spilled out of Heaven's gates, and into a field where shepherds were keeping watch over their flocks by night. The Bible records:

Suddenly, a large army of angels appeared... They were praising God by saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those who have his good will!” Then the angels left them and went back to heaven.

The shepherds said to each other, “Let us go to Bethlehem and see what the Lord has told us about.” They went quickly and found Mary and Joseph with the baby, who was lying in a manger. When they saw the child, they repeated what they had been told about him. Everyone who heard the shepherds' account was amazed. Mary treasured all these things in her heart and always thought about them.

As the shepherds returned to their flock, they glorified and praised God for everything they had seen and heard. Everything happened the way the angel had told them.

Luke, who got talk to Mary and ask her about these events, is told that she never forgot all of the wonder surrounding the birth of Jesus. As scary as it was, as poor as they were, as cold, dirty, and smelly as that place was, it was there that the Holy One of God, Jesus the Messiah, arrived and dwelt among us.

That is the real reason for the season; that God comes to us poor miserable sinners and says, 'do not be afraid. I've come for you. I've come to save you. I've come to show you the way home.'

He is the breath of Heaven who has come down to give us life.

Amen.