

ADVENT 4 (12/21/08 – *Announcing the Way of the Blessed One*)

In the Name of JESUS. [Amen]

The *Holy Gospel* we are hearing today is also read at a Minor Church Festival on March 25th – called the *Annunciation*. That date was selected by the Church because it is exactly nine months before *CHRISTmas*. For here ... in this Word of God – on that very day ... as the angel Gabriel is *Announcing the Way of the Blessed One* – the Virgin Mary conceives the Christ-Child in her womb! The Blessed One – the One Who is Blessed in Himself ... and Who in turn will bless us – is on His Way! The Incarnation – the Word becoming Flesh – is already happening! For it is **not** that Christ first becomes Flesh at His Birth – though on *CHRISTmas Day* we shall hear those inspired words of St. John: ***and the Word became Flesh and dwelt among us*** – **no** ... it is **not** just at His *Nativity* ... He is already Flesh ... here and now ... at this moment. From the moment of His conception by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary – from that moment and forevermore ever since – He is the Incarnate ... the Enfleshed ... the humanly-Divine and Divinely-human ... Son of God! Wherever God the Son is, there He is with His Flesh. After this moment of conception in time, there is no time ... no place ... no circumstance ... in which the eternal Son of God is without His human Flesh – likewise, there is no time, place, or circumstance that the Flesh is without the Divinity ... even on the Cross and in the Tomb. If He is in heaven – He is there in His Flesh and Divinity. If He is on earth – He is there with His Flesh and Divinity. Indeed, as God He is omnipresent ... and everywhere the Son is present, He is there in His Flesh and Divinity – this is indeed a great and unfathomable mystery!

{Incidentally: This incarnation of the Son of God in the womb of Mary has – for us Christians at least – great implications regarding our determination of the moment of human life in the womb ... and life and abortion (sanctity of life) issues in general.}

As we hear the angel Gabriel *Announcing the Way of the Blessed One*, God's Word for today is brimming over with interesting details. The first thing Luke mentions is the fact that Elizabeth is now in her sixth month – John the Baptizer is six months older than his eternal Cousin, Jesus ... Whose Way he was sent to prepare – according to the flesh. That this is what Luke means when he says: ***in the sixth month*** is made clear in verse 36 when we hear Gabriel say: ***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.*** By God's gracious intervention, Elizabeth (and Zechariah) have gone ***From Barren to Blessed*** ... just like the patriarchs before them – as we've been hearing on Wednesday evenings.

Gabriel has been sent from God to a virgin – **the** Virgin, actually, the one foretold by Isaiah [7.14] – Mary ... of the house of David ... who dwells in Nazareth of Galilee. And coming to her he says: **Greetings** (or, better, **Rejoice**), **O favored one** – which is to say: you who **have been** and **are abidingly** highly favor, graced, blessed. Blessed not just by men – as Mary sings by inspiration in the *Magnificat*: **behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed** [1.48] – but most importantly by God: **the Lord is with you! Rejoice, O you who have been abidingly favored and grace, the Lord is with you!** That's what Gabriel is saying! Interestingly, in MATTHEW [1.23] we are told that this Child's Name shall be called **Immanuel** – meaning, **God with us**. And so it is – just as in the beginning God created by His Word and Spirit ... so now in Mary's womb the Christ is conceived by the Word and Spirit – God is with Mary ... **the Lord is with you** ... indeed, **in you** ... in your womb ... at least soon to be, Gabriel is saying. Wow! What words of greeting!

But as marvelous as the angel's words of God were that day, they were not easy for Mary – known for pondering such things in her heart. First, our text says that she was **greatly troubled** by this greeting – so troubled, indeed, that Gabriel must next say: **Do not be afraid** ... or, better, **Stop being afraid**. And notice, whenever God's messengers say, **Stop being afraid**, they **always** give a reason: **for you have found favor with God** – you obtained grace from God. God is pouring out His grace upon lowly, humble Mary – in a very special ... one-of-a-kind way. **And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a Son, and you shall call His Name JESUS** – and MATTHEW adds: **for He will save His people from their sins** [1.21]. Wow – again! And Gabriel goes on – this Son will be the Great One ... the Son of the Most High (the Son of God the Father) ... the long-promised One to sit on David's throne ... reigning **forever** ... in an endless Kingdom! God's promise through Nathan the prophet is being fulfilled ... in Mary – a literally Divine, Son-of-God, saving King is conceived in her womb! What grace and blessedness God has bestowed upon this humble maiden!

How will this be, since I am a virgin?, is Mary's reply. Note that this is not like Zechariah's unbelief or demand for a sign of proof about his son John. Mary's question is one of wonder – *How is this Word of God going to come to pass, since I do not know a man in the way necessary to conceive this Son?* So the messenger of God explains: **The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you**. That's how it shall be – miraculously ... one-of-a-kind ... prophecy fulfilling ... never-to-be-repeated ... Divine. **For nothing will be impossible with God!**

We – like Mary – struggle with the deep meaning and purpose of God's word in our lives. Mary was afraid, not fully grasping what this message from the Lord

through His champion messenger – His angel Gabriel – meant precisely. We too are fearful when God’s clear Word challenges what we thought we knew ... causing us to rethink and change our attitudes and behaviors. God’s challenging words troubled Mary greatly – for an awesome responsibility was now given to her. Our God-given responsibility with His Word sometimes distresses us as well ... causing us to refrain from reading, marking, learning, and inwardly digesting it as we ought. God’s message to Mary challenged her mind as she tried to reason what it might mean to give birth to God the Messiah ... and how it could happen when she was still a virgin! We too are tempted to rationalize God’s Word away – even dismissing parts of it as “extreme” or “radical” when it doesn’t fit our preconceived notions of how things ought to be ... or how we **want** them to be (with or without God’s favor).

You will notice a common problem you share with Mary in her fears ... her distresses ... and her misunderstandings. Your terrors, your anxieties and your misconceptions all come from you – for you are a sinner just like the Virgin Mary. You are in the very same situation as she – in great need of God’s grace and favor ... having to rely upon a Savior to rescue you from your sin as Mary likewise trusted. ***Let it be to me according to your word***, she spoke in faith. We likewise have no other answer than to rely upon God to deal with us according to His proclaimed Word and His Word-in-action in the Sacraments – for He has not promised to deal with us any other way.

And that Word of God proclaims to you this day the same thing Gabriel proclaimed to Mary: ***Fear not ... stop being afraid*** – for Christ Jesus came and lived and died a perfect love for you ... a love that casts out all fear. He was willing to love you to the fullest – that’s why He came – giving His life for you on the Cross as the greatest love of all ... the love of One Who gave His life for His friends. And then He rose triumphant to proclaim to you this message of life without fear forevermore in heaven above!

You have also received the same grace in the judgment of God as that which the angel proclaimed. God’s grace touched you in Holy Baptism to wash and cleanse you from your sins, to create and maintain a strong faith in your heart – through which faith the very holy goodness and righteousness of Jesus is credited to you in your heart by grace. This grace of Jesus results in a good judgment of God upon you, declaring you to be graced with life eternal in His kingdom that shall have no end.

You are also blessed and privileged to receive the same Jesus in you Who was found in the womb of the Virgin Mary! How can this be? Not of your own plan or workings. Remember the answer of the angel: ***For nothing shall be impossible***

with God! [1.37] Jesus in us as He once was in Mary? Yes! For He comes to us fully in the Sacrament of the Altar! God does the impossible of giving us the entire Body of Jesus in the bread, and His life-giving Blood in the cup! In the eating and drinking of Holy Communion, the very same Jesus Who was incarnate in Mary comes to abide in you – ***For nothing shall be impossible with God!***

Though like Mary we have fears ... worries ... and misgivings about the miraculous works of God, we trust His Word as she did, knowing ***The Lord be with you*** happens as He says. We move past our anxieties and questions of how God can do such great things, trusting as Mary did, saying: ***Let it be to me according to your word.***

In the Name of the FATHER and of the + SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT. [Amen]