

The Fourth Sunday of Advent (2017-18)

Luke 1:26–38 26In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, 27to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. 28And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" 29But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. 30And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. 32He 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, 33and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

34And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

35And 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. 36And 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. 37For nothing will be impossible with God." **38And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.**

In the Name of Jesus.

Now we've heard what Heaven wants us to put on our Christmas list: prayer! And quite specific prayer: that when your poor angel gets up to speak the Word of Christ, the Gospel, that the Lord would open his mouth and speak only according to His Word! AND, that when this old Adam has his own notions to stick in, that the Lord would strike him dumb! Same goes with y'all! Praise the Lord!

The Gospel according to Saint Luke bears this out! This is not the first time that the angel—whom the book of Daniel calls a 'man'!—not the first time that Gabriel appeared. We know of at least two times! Second to the Mother of our Lord; the first time, to the father of the Lord's prophet, John.

And when Zechariah wanted to KNOW how an old couple like him and Elisabeth could bear a child, Gabriel pronounced silence on John. When Mary asked how she, a virgin, would bear a child, Gabriel was glad to tell her of the Holy Spirit!

And—take note, and rejoice, and believe, and live!—when the young woman said, 'Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your Word,' the angel departed from her.

Your poor angel is always curious why my Bible is so long. I trust that it's a good practice to give the text the benefit of the doubt: that's there always something THERE in those words.

OF COURSE the angel went away from Mary after his visit. But WHY do WE need to hear that?

Well, one thing it does: it REMOVES the messenger from our vision, and leaves HER, the daughter of Eve who would carry in her womb God, for nine months, then give birth to her firstborn Son, and wrap Him in baby clothes, and lay Him in a manger, and no folk should be sad!

A fit young woman, this virgin! For she ran off to her cousin Elisabeth, to be with her until she delivered. Then, famously, she traveled to Bethlehem to deliver—a fitting place for the One Who is the Christ, the Anointed of God, His Son.

But Mary's stamina pales in comparison to her 'receive-ability,' from which we all are blessed, highly favored by the Lord!

For Mary HERSELF moved on from the messenger to the Message. Which, along with carrying and delivering the Son of God, our Savior, Christ the Lord, makes this young lady the theologian unparalleled, in whose presence every other mouth does well to close. ‘Behold, the servant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your proclamation!’

DESPITE who she is! Was the Gospel ever more clear?! DESPITE WHO we are, what we are, what we’ve done, what we are capable of.....!

A virgin has even LESS business being pregnant than her old, barren cousin. But with these two women, my dear Christian people—be glad!—the Lord is just getting WARMED UP!

Talk about ‘NO BUSINESS!’

‘WHY does this man welcome sinners, and EAT with them!’

‘God loves me DEARLY; loves EVEN ME!’

Your poor angel could not pick out my baptizer from a

crowd. Yet, he saved me, by the water and the Word.

And there must have been saints innumerable interceding for you and me, that we still heed the call to take and eat, take and drink, for the forgiveness of our sins. For you know, children of God, that you don't have it in you to keep bearing the cross daily, any more than I do. What angels, what ministers of grace are defending us?

And what newbies?!

Brother Joe did not grow up a Lutheran. Thank God! For he can see from the outside! And though the Lord forbids Joe to cast his pearls before swine, every now and then, he drops a pearl in front of his pastor. God will forgive.

And Joe tells us something we lifelong Lutherans may get so used to, that we are no longer amazed. Joe tells me, 'Lutherans just hear what the Lord says, and they STOP there! No additions or subtractions; no effort at explaining it or making it sensible to the world. Baptism now saves you means what it says; and so does This is My Body. It's the Holy Spirit's problem to do according to what He has said!'

God bless you Joe! Merry Christmas!

Hear the Word of your angel, but then let him leave;
leave you with the Word alone!

You are not what God created you to be, dear sons of Adam and daughters of Eve. The more fiercely you deny that, the more you prove it! And you have learned the will of your Creator. Was ever a spectacle more SAD?! That our Maker, our Father, our Lover, must holler and yell at those He made to be His dear children, to make them behave.

And if He must MAKE us behave, then no one ever truly behaves.

And as far as OUR orientation, toward HIM, OUR commitment, RE-commitment, RE-application—it doesn't matter what we call it; it's just more phony-baloney boasting and noise sprung from fear...

If the One Who said 'Let there be light—and there WAS light!'—if all He had in His bag for us was that hollering and yelling, you and I have no business raising our heads, or hoping, or being glad, or expecting God even

to HEAR our prayers, much less REVEL in them!

But NOW: you sing with ME!

‘Raise, raise the song on high, the Virgin sings her lullaby!’

Virgin’s don’t have babies! But THIS ONE did!

And old, barren women don’t have babies! But the virgin’s cousin did! And that baby prepared the way!

And sinners don’t have a claim on the God they hate, and wound, and crucify, and ignore, and put last place of all, and forget about daily and much...

But Mary’s Baby was crowned King on the cross of shame; and He welcomed to His kingdom, His paradise, the second last man who belongs there—you know belongs there LEAST!

And DESPITE Mary’s virginity; and DESPITE Elisabeth’s age; Gabriel’s proclamation came to be!

And DESPITE your poor angels lousy preaching, the Gospel is speaking to you today.

‘DESPITE your sins, DESPITE you lousy orientation toward God, DESPITE your doubts, your habits, your record, God accepts YOU, and His Kingdom is Your Kingdom; and He has nothing more pressing to do today other than to hear you pray!’

And I, your angel, declare to you this morning your King’s gift to you, DESPITE all arguments and reasons and objections: His Body, given for you; His Blood, shed for you, for the forgiveness of your sins.

Allow me, I beg you, to recede from your royal presence. And you say now to your Savior, your Father, your Dear Spirit:

Behold, the servant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to what my angel has just said in the Name of Jesus!

Amen.

