

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH  
COMPASS, PA

April 7, 2024 – THE ANNUNCIATION (TRANSFERRED)

The Rev. Dr. Nina George-Hacker

Sermon: “*His Name is Jesus: He Will Save Us From our Sins*”

Old Testament	Isaiah 7:10-14	(A prophecy of a child named Emmanuel, born of a virgin)
Canticle 15	Luke 1:46-55	(The Magnificat; Mary's song of praise to God)
Epistle	Hebrews 10:4-10	(Jesus Christ was offered for our sins, once and for all)
Gospel	St. Luke 1:26-38	(The Angel announces to Mary that she will bear Jesus, God the Son)

---

Once again, the Archangel Gabriel has been dispatched from the presence of God on a mission to deliver an announcement of extraordinary importance. Earlier, he had been chosen by God to give a similar announcement to Zechariah—whom we know as the father of John the Baptizer. But Zechariah was confounded by its content and skeptical as to how the message could possibly be fulfilled since he was old and his wife Elizabeth was beyond the age of childbearing.

If Gabriel had his hands full with Zechariah, the announcement he would give to Mary was even more surprising. At least in the Old Testament there were historical precedents of women who were barren or past the age of childbearing for whom God quickened their wombs and granted sons. Sarah and Abraham having Isaac was a prime example, along with Elkanah and Hannah, the parents of Samuel the prophet. Prior to his conception, Hannah was thought to be sterile. But at no time in the history of the world had any woman ever become pregnant while remaining a virgin. The conception of Jesus by the Holy Spirit would be the first and last time in all of history that such a miraculous event would take place.

Today's Gospel tells us that during the sixth month of Elizabeth's amazing pregnancy, Gabriel was sent by God to Nazareth in Galilee, a tiny village situated about halfway between the Mediterranean Sea and the Sea of Galilee. This little town, of no grand significance historically, was visited by a messenger direct from heaven that came to a virgin who was betrothed to Joseph, a descendant of the House of David. Betrothal in that time and culture was more serious than engagement in our context. Among the Jewish people, to break a betrothal required a divorce, even though the couple had not yet actually married or consummated their union.

When the angel came to Mary, Gabriel greeted her with: “Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!” Those of you from a Roman Catholic background may immediately find these words familiar, as they are part of the Rosary prayer, “Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.” The second part comes from Elizabeth's greeting when, later, Mary goes to visit John the Baptizer's mother.

In the translation we heard this morning, the Archangel says: “Greetings, favored one!” The words used in the Latin Vulgate translated by the Church Father, St. Jerome, are *gratia plena*, which means, literally, “filled with grace.” The Archangel Gabriel recognizes that Mary has received an abundance of divine grace that no woman prior to this moment in history had ever experienced. Her favor with the Lord was without equal. Imagine this young woman, likely just a teenager, hearing these words from an Archangel of God!

Then, just as Gabriel had instructed Zechariah about the name of his son, John, so the angel instructs Mary what her son should be called: “Don't be afraid, Mary, for behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and 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 ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” In St. Matthew's account of the Annunciation, Gabriel also speaks to Joseph, telling him, “[Mary] will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins” (1:21 NIV).

*What? My son, a king? Is it not enough that I'm going to have a son without ever being intimate with a man, but He will be the Son of God? And not enough that He will be the Son of God, but also a king, reigning on David's throne forever? I must be dreaming.*

Mary—known as *Maryam* in Hebrew—was a godly woman. Surely, she knew the Old Testament Scriptures. Certainly, she was aware that David’s ancestor, whose kingdom would last forever and ever, would be Israel’s long-awaited Messiah.

*Are you telling me the baby I’m going to have will be the Messiah? And you say, ‘don’t be afraid’? You tell me to rejoice. Yes, this is great news, but it’s terrifying at the same time.*

So, Mary said to the angel, “How?” You would think she might have asked, “Why?” but she says: “How can this be since I know not a man?” *Mr. Gabriel, maybe you have the wrong address. I’m not a sophisticated biologist, but I know something that every woman in Nazareth, every woman in Galilee, and every woman in Judea knows, and that is: the stork doesn’t bring babies. I can’t have a baby. I’m a virgin. How can this be?*

Let’s pause here for a second. Mary is responding as any child of nature would. Even in her day, people assumed there were such things as natural laws which acted independently from the sovereign providence of God. This is the view we still have of nature today. We tend to think that what we call the laws of nature, such as the conservation of matter, relativity, or cause-and-effect, are laws inherent in the created universe which operate independently from the power, providence, and sovereignty of God. It is for this reason, historically, that many have defined miracles as actions of God which are contrary to nature.

But since nature was created by, and is maintained by, God, *nothing* is contrary to what He has brought about or can bring about. As Christians, we believe that “natural laws” are simply the ordinary ways in which God governs His Creation, managing the universe according to patterns He establishes. Such patterns include, for example, the regularity of things falling when you drop them because of gravity. Yet even gravity has no power whatsoever apart from the sustaining power of God Himself.

But from Mary’s perspective, that of the natural, there was no way the angel’s announcement could come true. It was simply against the so-called “laws of nature.” The angel takes time to carefully explain the answer to Mary’s question, “How?” He tells her: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you.”

In the Greek translation of the Bible, the Holy Spirit is often referred to as the *dynamis*, the *power* of God. We get the English words *dynamite* and *dynamic* from it. That’s God’s Spirit, filled with the Lord’s sovereign, supernatural power. It was by the Holy Spirit’s “coming upon” the waters of the cosmos that the original Creation came into existence. In Genesis 1, we read: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void, and darkness was on the face of the deep.”

In that uncreated state in Genesis, the universe is described as formless and empty, a vacuum enveloped in total darkness; that is, until the Spirit of God hovered over the waters. It’s as if Gabriel is saying to Mary: “Do you remember Genesis? Right now, there is nothing in your womb. There is no form; it’s empty and dark. But the same Spirit that hovered over the darkness in the beginning will overshadow you, and by His omnipotent power you will conceive. The One whom you will bear will be the Holy One, different from every other person ever born, the supremely sacred and consecrated One, and He will be called the Son of God. Your relative, Elizabeth, has also conceived a son in her old age. She who was called barren is in her sixth month, for with God, nothing will be impossible.”\*

Why? Why is nothing impossible for God? Because He is omnipotent, meaning He has all the supreme power in the universe. And, He is eternal—He can’t stop being God. And as long as He is God, He controls and has power over *everything* He creates—including Mary’s virgin womb. That’s what Gabriel is trying to teach Mary—and *us!* With God, *nothing* is impossible and *all things* are possible. Mary finally got the point—and we need to, as well, for it should encourage *us*, too. She resigned herself to her divine destiny by stating: “[I am] the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”

From that moment on, God’s plan of salvation for the whole world, which He had envisioned from the beginning of time went into effect. It wasn’t a “plan B” after the Old Testament sacrifices didn’t work anymore. Jesus was the Savior of the World before the world was even created.

The first chapter of John affirms this when the Apostle writes: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind” (John 1:1-4 NIV). In the Greek text, “Word” is “*logos*,” meaning the “wisdom of God.” As St. Paul tells us: “Christ is the *wisdom* and *power* of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18-24b, *emphasis added*).

Neither Mary nor Joseph knew then that Jesus would have to suffer and die to save His people from their sins. Looking back at these historical events through our 21<sup>st</sup>-century eyes, we give thanks for the faithful obedience of both Mary and Joseph, who trusted God with what *seemed* impossible, in order to cooperate with Him in humanity’s long-awaited, desperately-needed deliverance from sin, death, and hell. They helped make possible our salvation.

It may seem odd to be celebrating the Annunciation on the second Sunday after Easter, and yet this *is* the Easter message: Because Jesus came into the world, we have been redeemed by His crucifixion and resurrection, and we shall live forever with Him. *Alleluia! Amen.*

---

\*Adapt. R. C. Sproul, “The Annunciation,” 6 November 2011, [Ligonier.org](https://www.ligonier.org) <<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/sermons/annunciation-sacluke>> 16 March 2024.