**Luke 1:26-38 (ESV)**

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, **27**  to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin’s name was Mary. **28** And he came to her and said, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!” **29** But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. **30** And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. **31** And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. **32** 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, **33** and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” **34** And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?” **35** 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. **36** 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. **37** For nothing will be impossible with God.” **38** And 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.

**“Nothing Like A Good Visit”**

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. There were quite a few laughs last week at the Church Basement Ladies Christmas. One scene that really stuck out is when the matriarchal woman of the kitchen crossed her arms to a comment made by a young girl. She brazenly declared, “We are Lutherans, we do not talk about Mary.” Humor always seems to draw out the truth as people started laughing. Somehow being Lutheran has come to mean we let Mary belong to the Roman Catholics. Yet, when Lutherans were coming together throughout Europe by means of the Formula of Concord they stated, “Therefore we believe, teach, and confess that Mary conceived and bore not only a plain, ordinary, mere man but the veritable Son of God; for this reason she is rightly called, and truly is, the mother of God” (Tappert 488:11).

The Sunday before Christmas requires us to meet Mary before celebrating the birth of Jesus. Even the blue for Advent, is finally a reminder of the Christ child carried by this virgin mother. It is right to call today’s Gospel reading, “The Annunciation” because that is what the angel Gabriel brings to Mary. One thing noticeable of God is how He likes to make a visit. He did it with Adam and Even in the garden. He did it with Moses in a burning bush. He did it with Nathan the prophet to David. However, when God visits sinners they seem to take it the wrong way. Adam and Eve ran from His voice. Moses ended up in doubt over what he was to do. David got the letdown of not being able to build the temple. Only Mary, a young woman in Nazareth, received God’s visit with all her heart. Unlike anyone else, she was the first to receive the good news of God’s Son fully revealed to sinners. There is nothing like a good visit, especially when God brings the mystery of the Gospel.

The Trinity was present when Mary heard about what we call “the incarnation.” God becoming man was a big deal to God. Such joy was in heaven that the angel Gabriel said upfront, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!” Mary heard other words of welcome before, but not like these words. St. Luke goes on to note, “But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.” Even with good news, our sinful minds by nature stand in the way. The Father was calling her to faith in His Word of promise, but she could not hear it. It made the angel proclaim, “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.” In order for her not to be afraid, fear had to leave. Only the Word of salvation can to do this for sinners. Mary heard the comforting answer to cast out her fear. She identified the reason for this child in calling Him “Jesus,” which means Savior. Likewise, others would call Him “the Son of the Most High,” which means God’s Son.

The Father in heaven visits us still with loving words. God by Holy Scripture has been calling sinful humanity in the same way since Christ’s coming. However, we are by nature hard of hearing, and worse, afraid. Jesus knew this very well as the Son of God when He preached saying, “He who has ears to hear let him hear” (Luke 8:8). Mary heard the good news and so can we hear the preaching of the Gospel. It is to trust what God has to say. To turn away from His Word is only sin and death. When we think about a visit, preaching is not what anyone wants. Yet, this is how God deals with man. During our Advent mid-week service we announced, “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son…” (Hebrews 1:1-2). It was from Gabriel preaching of Jesus where fear turned into faith for Mary. This same message of the Savior calms us with God’s love. A visit from the Father is to say to the baptized, “Greetings, highly favored one.” Dare we trust this preaching that comes to sinners?

Mary showed her trust in the word of good news from God. Her question to the angel was similar to how we as Lutherans ask, “What does this mean?” It was not doubt, but a desire for deeper meaning. The answer came by the Holy Spirit revealing the truth. “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.” The whole process would be an act outside of her hands. God becoming man was a miracle beyond the miracle of life as we know it. The angel revealed the uniqueness of this child. He would be “holy.” Not merely, “set apart” like John the baptizer, but truly the holy of holies in flesh and blood. As one commentator writes, “Jesus is holy because He is sinless, conceived without sin, and, secondly He is God and man in one and the same person” (Bul’s Notes 12). The Holy Spirit had no problem overshadowing Mary. Her flesh would not spoil the coming of God’s Son to dwell with sinners.

The Spirit of God visits us to reveal the truth. There is an order in how it is that we are Christians. Knowing God saves us purely by His gracious favor. We as Lutherans confess along with Mary, “I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him, but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts sanctified and kept me in the one true faith…” Entrance into the kingdom of God, new life, faith, just being Christian begins and rests with the work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus told His disciple, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life (John 6:63).” We do not bear the child of Mary, but the Spirit still overshadows us with the Holy One Jesus Christ. All that falls upon our life by water, bread, wine and the word of absolution is for us. As the famous carol goes, “O little child of Bethlehem, Descended to us, we pray; Cast out our sin, and enter in, Be born in us today.” The Spirit reveals the Holiness of Jesus who makes us Holy by offering Himself as the sacrifice.

Mary knew this blessing from the Spirit because it changed her life. She said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” The Son of God had made His home in her womb. She believed the good news spoken by Gabriel and the Spirit was already at work in her flesh. What she received from the fullness of God’s favor made her into a servant of the Lord. The blessed mother of God would go to her relative with this same Word of the Gospel. As St. Luke records, “And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! (Luke 1:41-42).” Jesus was already making His presence known as the Son of God. Later it would be clear that Mary carried the Christ child, but only He would hang upon the cross. Mary did not create the church. Only the risen Savior sent out His baptized to preach His Word.

People do not prefer visitors staying longer than they should. We like to get back to our life and the way we had it. Well, you had better be ready for change when coming to the Lord’s Supper. Jesus visits us, only to make His home among us. What we receive from the Sacrament of the Altar is according to His Word. All that the Son of God gives of His true body and blood goes out into the world in our flesh. We are His servants because He has served us by His presence as Savior. Forgiveness, life, and salvation is for those humbled to hear what God says by repentance and faith. This is what Mary revealed as she brought the redeeming Word to another in a visit. In meeting Mary today, we are ready meet God for us in a manger on Christmas Day. There is nothing like a good visit, especially when God brings the mystery of the Gospel. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes al understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting, Amen.