

4th Sunday of Advent

December 20, 2020

Collect: PURIFY OUR CONSCIENCE, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that your Son Jesus Christ, at his coming, may find in us a mansion prepared for himself; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Lessons: 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16

Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26 or Canticles 3 or 15

Romans 16:25-27

Luke 1:26-38

Sermon: Today's Gospel is very special, it is God sending his messenger angel, Gabriel, to Nazareth, a town in the Galilee area. He is to inform a young woman that God has chosen her to be the mother of his Son, Jesus Christ.

This particular act is called the **Annunciation of Mary**. Of all the women in the world, God has selected this simple girl to be the mother of his Son, **the Messiah, the Anointed One** or as he would call himself, **the Son of Man**. This is the savior the prophets had been preaching or prophesying about. He was to come and save Israel; he would drive the occupying captors out of Israel and put the nation of Israel in charge of their own government. He would bring justice to the world. He would separate the righteous from the unrighteous. The righteous would go to his Father's house in heaven and the unrighteous would go to sheol (we commonly call it hell) which would be a fiery place with gnashing of teeth.

Such huge expectations for an expected savior. Yet he would come not from a priestly family or a family of royalty. Instead, he would come from a family of common folk. Earlier I called Mary a simple girl, by this I meant the Bible tells or show us nothing exceptional about her. There are only three things

we can be certain of, **1**. She was old enough to have monthly blood. (This is shown by custom of her culture. Once a young girl had this blood it meant she could have children and so it was time to marry.) **2**. She was betrothed to Joseph. (She had an engagement contract that stated she would marry Joseph at the end of a year) **3**. God sent the angel, Gabriel, to her. (He was to tell that she would be the mother of God's Son).

Let's face it these are the facts that the Bible tells us. There is another, not so well documented fact that her mother's name was Anne. In Hebrew or the Aramaic language that Jesus commonly spoke, she would be known as Hannah. Anne is the Greek name used for the name Hannah.

Today's Gospel tells the story of Mary being informed that she is to bear God's Son. However, many churches, including the Episcopal, Catholic and Lutheran, celebrate the **holy or feast day of The Annunciation on the 25th of March**. Why this date, I really don't know. The important fact is that God told Mary and we commemorate it by celebrating with a church service.

Now back to Mary receiving this good news. At first, she was terrified. She was awakened from sleep by a brilliant light that filled her room and then she heard a male voice telling her not to be afraid. Then this voice spoke the most amazing words: "Mary you have found favor with God, he has chosen you to be the mother of his son, Jesus."

He went to say other amazing things. He would say that God would place the child in her womb and that he would be great, he would have a throne and a kingdom that derived from the house of David. He would have a kingdom that would never end.

Not only was Mary frightened, she found this unbelievable. She asked the angel, Gabriel, "How can this be? I am a virgin; I've not had sex with a man!"

Gabriel then told her that God would use the Holy Spirit to place the baby in her womb. The baby would be holy and he would be called the Son of God.

Gabriel then shared some more news with her. He told her that her cousin Elizabeth who had not been able to get pregnant was now, indeed, six months pregnant. I can imagine Gabriel saying, "See Mary, nothing is impossible for God."

This news quietened Mary and she surrendered to God's will saying, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

Mary at first, as many of us would have been, was terrified being awakened from sleep with a brilliant light filling her room, and then hearing the male voice of a stranger saying that he wanted to tell you something.

The news that he delivered was at first unbelievable, she was only a girl, not a prophet, nor a priest, nor a princess. This news said that God had decided to change her life. Now, instead of it being a common or simple life, it would have a more significant and larger purpose. She would know, and expect, God to watch over daily.

But of course, there would be problems. As her pregnancy progressed and began to show, she would be scrutinized by town folk and of course, her intended, Joseph. The tongues would wag and there would be gossip. She may have found that she didn't want to go out in public, instead she would prefer to hide in the house.

What a predicament God had put her in! His solution was to have her go to visit and stay with her cousin, Elizabeth, in another town for a while.

Regardless the difficulties you may have to go through, God has a plan and will work things out for you. If you believe, have faith and trust in God he will never let you be in a place or situation where his grace and mercy can't see you through.

Come Lord Jesus. Amen.