

The Annunciation of Our Lord: March 25, 2020
“Not Just Another Announcement”

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, there have been many announcements these last several weeks. It can be difficult to work through the fear and stress of the unknown, and the constant barrage of more information, and then with more information seems to come more and more questions. That is the character of announcements.

This is March 25, which is exactly nine months before Christmas Day. I turn your attention to another announcement. It was one that was sudden, and frightening at first. It was an announcement that had many emotions that needed to be sorted, and it was an announcement that also had no human contact, “*The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!”*¹

God knew this visit and this announcement would cause fear, so His opening line in His statement contains three important words of promise. Greetings—this is the word that means rejoice. While the sudden vision of an angel, a messenger, sent from God can be a frightening thing for a sinner who lives in suffering, the first word Mary hears is rejoice. Whatever message is to follow is that will cause joy.

The second word she hears is favored one—that is one upon whom kindness is manifested and grace is bestowed. This is not by anything Mary has done, but by the grace and loving-kindness of God, she is given a gift from God.

Then the angel ends His first sentence with a third word, the Lord is with you—whatever the announcement contains, whatever words are to follow, Mary is prepared by God. We know it will cause some pain and heartache. We know that she will be ridiculed, and there will be shame from the community. Not everyone will believe her miraculous story. Her own husband, the very one to whom she is

¹ Luke 1:26-28

betrothed will not believe her until he also has a message sent to Him by God through an angel. She will experience many sufferings and in pain, she will bring forth children. She will travel a long ways while pregnant, which is no easy task. She will give birth in a stable. She will feel like she has lost her son at the age of twelve. She will watch as her son is mocked, spit on, beaten, nailed to a cross, and crucified. The struggle she must have had to watch her son hanging from the tree, and hear His love for her to be continually taken care of, “Mother behold your son.” She will suffer as He dies and is buried.

Yet, this is the announcement—Rejoice, Oh favored one. The Lord is with you. No matter what this world brings. No matter what suffering of sickness, fear, mocking, hostility, pain, physical, emotional, or spiritual; the Lord is with you. Even in death, through death, the Lord is with you.

These are all yet to come for Mary, she simply responds as many of us have with the barrage of announcements lately, in fear. Fearful of what the rest of the story will bring. We try to discern what sort of greeting this might be. From the world, I have yet to hear one greeting that starts off this same way. Greetings, rejoice, you have grace and the Lord is with you. The world struggles with chaos and the devastating impact being leveled by this new virus; but it is nothing new. The devil, the world, and the sinful flesh are always seeking someway to disrupt the peace of God; always seeking to cause fear and casting doubt upon the gift of peace in God that you truly have through His Son. Not because you have done anything super-amazing, but simply because you are His favored one. His Son has died for you. You are baptized; the Lord is with you.

While Mary is trying to sort through her emotions, while she puts on her detective hat and becomes observant of everything that is going on around her, while she tries to find the real message in the angel’s words (is he telling the truth or blowing smoke) the angel continues the announcement, ***“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. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his***

father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.²

This announcement has a very important promise. To anyone who has read and knows the Old Testament Scriptures, the very first Gospel promise made to Eve is now being fulfilled in one of her daughters. This young virgin is promised a son, but not just any son. In this Son, the curse of the Fall and payment for sin will be made. His heel will be crushed, but this son will crush the head of Satan. This Son will give His innocent suffering and death to pardon the guilty; He will shed His blood to redeem the captives; He will deliver His body to death to open death's dark prison. The Son will be named Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins. This child will be the terror of hell, the joy of heaven, and the light of life and peace to all who dwell in the shadow of the valley of death.

The God whom is Most High, whose ways are not our ways, and whose thoughts are not our thoughts, has come. David prayed, ***“Remember your word to your servant, in which you have made me hope. This is my comfort in my affliction, that your promise gives me life.”***³ David did not have a peaceful life. From Goliath, Saul, his own sons, and his enemies of surrounding nations, David was afflicted from without. From within he was afflicted with his own temptations, despair, worry, and anxiety, which is highlighted not least of all with Bathsheba, Uriah, and Nathan. In the midst of all these things, David had comfort. He had the promise from God, and it gave him life. God's Word of promise gave him hope. Like you, he received the announcement, the word of promise, through means; but, unlike you, the promised Savior had not yet been born. Through the many uncertainties of David's life, he was certain of God's promise. It was grounded in faith that God had made it, and if God had made it, it will be kept.

It was in this same faith that Mary hears this promise of the Savior and the announcement that nothing will be impossible with God. The salvation of mankind is not impossible. The fulfilling of the promise to Eve is not impossible. The hope in the midst of chaos, and life in the midst of death is not impossible.

² Luke 1:30-33

³ Psalm 119:49-50

This faith bursts forth in the confession, “***Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.***”⁴ In humility, Mary is lifted up. To the poor in spirit belongs the Kingdom of Heaven, and from this announcement the kingdom of heaven now resides in the womb of Mary.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, even in the midst of this pandemic, we live in the best of times. The promised seed to Eve, the One Anointed to die for the sins of the world has come. That same Word is readily available to us. I miss not seeing you all face to face, but the word of God still is living and active. Forgiveness is still given through the speaking of His word. You can at all times and in all places lift your hands, “***The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.***”⁵

This are strange and trying times, but the Lord is at hand. He has not abandoned you, any of you. He is here. He has joined you to Himself in the waters of Holy Baptism. As you hear His word, read it, pray it—the Lord is at hand. He reminds you of His grace in the midst of suffering and death; through suffering and death.

The world with its greed and excess, its self-indulgent luxury away from God is being revealed. Faith is being tested with every announcement. Rejoice today in the Lord. We have nine months until Christmas. The babe who is born is tonight announced in flesh. He will live and develop in the womb. He will wander this miserable world of immorality and temptation to serve Himself above all things. He will suffer grief and violence. He will know rejection and isolation. He will know fear and sadness. He will know mocking and shame. He will know death and burial.

Brothers and sisters, He will also know the resurrection. He will know ascension to right hand of God. Nothing will be impossible, and He sits, judging the living and dead, as a man who knows.

Do you what else He knows. He knows you. When you find yourself asking with the Psalmist, “***What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that***

⁴ Luke 1:38

⁵ Philippians 4:5-7

*you care for him?”*⁶ Look to the cross. Make the sign of the cross and remember your baptism. He knows every hair on your head, and recall Jesus words’ of announcement, “*Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows.*”⁷

You are worth more than any sparrow. You are worth the death His only-begotten Son. You are worth God becoming man. You are worth God dying for you. Whether you are healthy, or sick, at peace or suffering, this announcement is for you, “*Rejoice, Oh favored one, the Lord is with you.*”⁸ Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

⁶ Psalm 8:4

⁷ Luke 12:6-7

⁸ Luke 1:28