



In our Gospel reading for today’s Eucharist we have the story of the Annunciation. The story of the Annunciation is the story of God revealing the way he will enter into His own creation.

The story begins with God sending the angel Gabriel to a young girl named Mary, who lived in the town of Nazareth in Galilee.

What is the first thing that Gabriel says to Mary? “Do not be afraid.” These same words were spoken to Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Zachariah; to name just a few. If you know anything about the Scriptures, you know that every time you hear these words you had better pay attention because God is about to do something

miraculous for us and for our salvation.

Why did the angel tell Mary not to be afraid? Well, it was because he had a rather disconcerting message. If she consented, she was going to have a baby boy. However, Mary was not uninformed in these matters. How can I put this? Let’s just say that she knew that there were certain requirements that ordinarily needed to be met before a woman could conceive and bear a child, and she knew that she didn’t qualify. So she asked; how will this be possible?

So, Gabriel answered her question in the following way: “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 ‘holy’ he will be called the Son of God.” How did Mary respond? Did she say, “I will think about that and get back to you later.”? No. She responded: “Here I am, the servant of the Lord: let it be with me according to your word.”

In reflecting on this passage of Scripture, Luther says that there are three miracles here. 1) God and humankind are joined in the child that will be conceived, 2) the mother shall remain a virgin, and 3) that Mary believed that this miracle would be accomplished in her. [Luther said, “The miracle that Christ is born of a virgin is a mere trifle. That God becomes human is an even greater miracle. But the most amazing thing of all is that Mary finds the angel’s message credible and that the child promised would be hers.”]

Mary’s faith and humility and obedience challenge us. Oh, do they challenge us! Her faith challenges our lack of faith and trust in God’s Word and his promises. Her humility challenges our arrogance and pride. Her obedience challenges our rebelliousness.

What was God really asking Mary? He was asking her to be the door through which he would enter the world. It’s a pretty small door don’t you think? The human birth channel is very small. How was the God who is without beginning or end, going to enter creation through this door? Philippians chapter 4 is instructive at this point. Though he was God, he emptied himself and became a human being. You see even the incarnation required sacrifice on God’s part. The incarnation prefigures the cross itself.

Why did he choose to enter in this way? I was talking with Kelli Farrar about this and she pointed out that God is God so he could enter the world any way he pleased. This is most certainly true. The theological concept here is the sovereignty of God. And yet, God chose to enter the world through the door of Mary for a really good reason.

[Lewis Cassell, who used to be the religion editor for the associated press once told an interesting story about a man named Harry. Harry had a family and lived on a farm outside of a town. Harry was kind of an agnostic, who honestly admitted that he didn't understand what Christmas was all about. He wasn't sure if he could buy into the talk about God becoming human in Jesus. It really didn't make all that much sense. Well, one Christmas Eve Harry decided that he wasn't going to attend church on Christmas Eve because he didn't want to be a hypocrite. And so, his wife and kids piled into the car and took off for church while Harry stayed home to read a book. As he was sitting reading his book, all of a sudden he heard something crash into the house. Harry jumped up, put on his coat and ran to the front door. When he reached the front door the first thing he noticed was that it was snowing. He then ran to the side of the house. And there was a group of wild geese sitting in the snow, honking to beat the band. Apparently, the geese had become disoriented in the snow and flew right into the side of the house. He noticed that the geese were stunned and since the weather was turning bad, he decided to try to get them to go into his barn for the night. So he went and opened up the barn door and tried to herd the birds into the barn. Well, that didn't work too well because the birds became frightened and wouldn't move an inch. Then Harry had a brain storm. He ran to the barn, got some cracked corn and laid down a path from where the geese were to the barn. But again the birds were frightened and they wouldn't move an inch. And so Harry thought to himself, "What am I going to do now? To these birds I must seem to be a strange and terrifying creature. If only I could get them to trust me... If only I were a bird." — And all of a sudden Harry heard the church bells ringing in the town and he fell down on his knees and for the first time he understood the words of the Nicene Creed, "for us and for our salvation he came down from heaven."] [Story Used in Christmas Eve Sermon 1992]

Why did God choose to enter the world through the door of Mary? So he would not scare the hell out of us and destroy us. He enters the world to save and redeem us.

Why a virgin birth? It was God's way of saying that the birth of true righteousness, true love, true forgiveness for which the world has been longing for ever since Adam and Eve will always be a virgin birth. For you see, no amount of human power or wisdom will ever be able to bring true righteousness, true love and true forgiveness into this world. These things will only come as an act and gift of God and that is why the angel says, "The child to be born will be called the Son of God."

Yes, blessed are you, Mary for you are the door. You are the *theotokos*. You are the God-bearer. And blessed is the one who will be born. And it is for his birth that we now wait. AMEN.

+Christo Gloria in Ecclesia +