

Fourth Sunday in Advent/December 20, 2020
Luke 1:26-38/Life Changing News
Holy Spirit Lutheran Church
Pastor Jerry Stobaugh

“...and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

In today’s Gospel, Mary received life changing news. [An angel] came to [Mary] and said, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!” Her life would never be the same again. All generations honor her memory, example and remember her as the mother of God. For Mary herself, though, this honor meant a life of hardship. As the mother of God, she had some very unique and painful experiences.

Ours and Mary’s culture are separated by two thousand years and half the circumference of the earth. Because of this we tend to romanticize Mary’s situation and make it a pristine, stylized, rendition of the real thing.

Mary was thrust into a messy situation. In a culture that stoned people to death for committing adultery, she had the tough assignment of being pregnant without a husband. We know she was a virgin when she gave birth to Jesus, but her own culture did not understand this fact. We hold her up as a paragon of virgin virtue, but her own culture would have seen her as a tarnished woman.

Then there were all those trips foretold by the prophets. Messiah must be born in Bethlehem, called out of Egypt, and yet grow up in Nazareth. It is eighty miles of very rough terrain from Nazareth to Bethlehem. In a day when foot or beast were the only means of transport, it could not have been a comfortable trip for a woman who was about to give birth.

Then there were the circumstances of the actual birth. I am sure Joseph did what he could to protect Mary's modesty, but with no place to stay, the birth had to be uncomfortably public. We learn Mary laid Jesus, her newborn son, in a feeding trough.

Then, a few months after the birth, just about the time Mary and Joseph were beginning to have a normal life, just about the time they were finally able to set up housekeeping, they suddenly had to travel to Egypt because Herod wanted to kill Jesus.

Then there was Mary's role in The Passion. Mary could only watch as her son suffered several unjust trials, tortures, and eventually death on a cross. The reality of Mary's life is far from the ideal image most people have of her. It is certainly not what most people expect when an angel says a person has been favored by God.

The stark reality of Mary's life reminds us all Jesus is truly human. When He took on human flesh, He did not take on the flesh of kings in palaces, but the flesh of the lowest peasant. We see in the stark reality of Mary's life as the mother of Jesus, Jesus endured every hardship we could possibly face. From the time of His conception in Mary's womb until His friends laid Him in a tomb, He endured the worst life on this earth has to offer.

Although the sufferings of Messiah reach their climax at the cross, the hardships of His humble birth and the early persecution by King Herod already show us His entire life, beginning at conception, is a life of suffering for us.

Remember who this is. This is the Son of God who reigns in glory with the Father and the Holy Spirit. No one can imagine the contrast between His role as ruler of all things and His role as substitute for us. Who can compare life in the holy places of heaven to life on this

sin-filled earth? Yet that is what Jesus endured as He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and began His life as a fertilized egg in the womb of the Virgin Mary.

Why did Jesus submit to all this? He submitted in order to live up to His name. The angel Gabriel himself tells us about this. He said, “You shall call his name Jesus.” In the original language Mary spoke, Jesus means The LORD saves. As the angel told Joseph in a dream, [Matt 1:21] “You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” His name and His work are one and the same, Jesus, saving people from sin.

Boy do we need saving. It doesn't take a whole lot of time with the Ten Commandments to show us our sin and our desperate need for a savior. It doesn't take a whole lot of thought to remember the sicknesses and injuries in our lives because of our sin. The simple fact death visits us all is a constant reminder of our fallen state. The evidence of our sin is all around us.

Sin is the reason the Son of God submitted to life in the womb of the Virgin. It is the reason He submitted to birth into the family of a poor peasant laborer. It is the reason He endured all the hardship of life on a sin-filled planet. It is the reason He endured torture, shame, and ultimately death on a cross. He endured all these things in order to spare us from the eternal punishment we earn with our sin.

As Jesus saved us from our sin, He fulfilled the word the Lord spoke to Mary through the angel Gabriel, “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.” As Jesus' enemies gazed on Him as He suffered on the cross, they had no idea they were witnessing a coronation. They did not understand what looks like a cross here on this earth is actually a throne. They do not

understand Jesus, with His suffering and death was setting up the heavenly kingdom of Israel for all people. He was transforming the national throne of David into a transcendent, eternal, heavenly throne. He was establishing the eternal Israel, the eternal house of Jacob. All those who believe in Jesus are citizens of that eternal kingdom.

Jesus opened up that kingdom to its citizens with His own resurrection from the dead. In this way He assures us all citizens of Heaven will one day rise from the dead in their immortal bodies and join Him as He reigns forever on the throne of David, His ancestor. There all the citizens of the new Israel, His Church, will live without sin, without sadness, without sickness, and without death. We shall live under the blessing of His reign.

Today's Gospel tells us how the angel Gabriel brought a message to the Virgin Mary that would change her life forever. His greeting to her, not only changed her life, but it changed the history of the whole world. That greeting even changed the nature of eternity. For it was at that moment, when Mary heard the word of God from the mouth of the angel, our Lord began His mission to this earth. It was at that moment the seed who would crush the serpent's head, the seed promised long ago to Adam and Eve, was finally planted in the womb of the woman, a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David, a virgin whose name was Mary whose son will take you into the new heavens and the new earth.