

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commings+ Rector

Scripture: Luke 1:39-56

"People Must Know"

The account of today's Gospel takes me back to 1999. In the City of Nazareth, there is a church, The Church of the Annunciation. Inside that church it is believed there is a grotto that you can look at and go up to the iron gates, and it is believed that that is the place where the Angel Gabriel came to Mary. Today's Holy Gospel does not have that account in it, for that account takes place just before Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth. I want to share with you about the Angel Gabriel telling Mary that the Holy Spirit will come upon her, enabling her to do and be more than she could possibly do or be by herself, and at the same time *'the power of the Most High'* will overshadow her. Please, think about this - God Himself, the Creator of everything, will surround her completely with His sovereign power. This sounds pretty amazing, but remember that in the Bible, and in Jewish and Christian thought, the true God is the One in whose image humans were made in the first place. We are not talking about some pagan god interfering roughly and inappropriately in the affairs of people, but about the One who made us for Himself. When He takes the initiative, it is always a matter of love; a love which will care for us and offer us His salvation. Now I am excited that at the 5:30 PM service on Christmas Eve, I will sit along here, and I will invite the kids to come up. There will be no Children's Church, because I want to spend some time with them and share with them about the rescuer and how humanity was so messed up that it needed a rescuer. That is why God sent Him in the first place.

Mary is a perfect example of what always happens when God is at work by grace through the people He created. God's power and Holy Spirit result in things being done which would have been unthinkable any other way – and there really is no other explanation. Sadly, no one is likely to be convinced of Luke's account of these events if they are not already open to the possibility that Jesus was also the One in whom Israel's God had made His personal appearance and walked right into human history. Jesus split time in two – AD and what we used to call BC – but for some reason we now call BCE – Before the Common Era. I am sorry, but for me it is always BC – Before Christ, and AD – Anno Domine, which is the Latin for Year of the Lord. It is saying it is God's time. He made His personal appearance and split time in two. This is amazing that through belief in God, all things are possible!

Think about how and where Jesus would be born. He would be born as the Messiah, the Holy One, the anointed One, the King of the house of David. God had promised David a descendant who would reign for ever – not over Israel only, but also the whole world. And this coming king would be, the Son of God. In 2 Samuel 7:14 God says, *"I will be His Father, and He will be my Son."* Wow! In Psalm 2:7 God clearly says through King David, *"I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father.'"* In Psalm 89:26-27 God proclaims this, *"He will call out to me, 'You are my Father, my God, the Rock my Savior.' I will also appoint him my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth."* If you will, the breadcrumbs have all been spread out all through all of Scripture, telling people that God's own Son was coming – to rescue us, to save us! All we need to do is follow Him! Isn't

it interesting that when Jesus calls His first Apostles – He says, “Follow Me.” He says that to us too.

The Birth of Jesus is somehow identified with all of the Christmas shows which have nothing to do with Him coming to save us from our own sins. It is easier for people to celebrate and believe in other things than to grasp what happens here in Luke chapter 1, and later in Luke chapter 2 – which we will celebrate this coming Friday night, Christmas Eve. We have the announcing and conception of a baby, the power of God, and the challenge to all earthly kingdoms – and maybe that’s one reason why it’s so controversial. Some people don’t even want to even think that there might be a King who could claim this sort of absolute power and loyalty – over every other ruler that ever lived.

There is more going on during this time. We need to remember about the puzzled Zechariah who was filled with doubt and questioned the Angel Gabriel. Because of that doubt he was struck speechless until the day of circumcision of his son, John the Baptist. We need to think about the obedient humility of this young teenager named Mary. She too questions Gabriel, but it is in the form of a request for information, rather than doubt. There is no doubt in her heart at all. Instead, faced with the chance to be the mother of the Messiah, and not really sure or understanding what this will involve, she says the words which have resonated throughout history, the years as a model of the human response to God’s unexpected calling. She said, *“I am the Lord's servant, may it be to me as you have said.”* (Luke 1:38) Mary had a great faith to obey God and to be subject to His will.

Mary then goes to visit her cousin Elizabeth, Zachariah’s wife, who the angel told her was pregnant. When Mary got to the hill country of Judea, near Jerusalem, Luke’s Gospel tells us, *“When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!"* (Luke 1:41-42) Elizabeth was given a supernatural knowledge by the Holy Spirit that Mary was not just pregnant, but she was bearing the Son of God – the Messiah, the Anointed One.

It is important for us to close with the words that Mary responded with to Elizabeth, which has been called the ‘Magnificat.’ Listen to these special words – filled with love and faith - and no fear - that Mary said: *"My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me-- holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers."* (Luke 1:46-55)

Fourth Sunday of Advent, December 19, 2021, Year C

I want to share with you something that happened this past Wednesday Night during our Bible Study, we watched a wonderful dramatization of the experience that Mary and Joseph had on their journey to fulfill God's promise given them by their 'messenger' – the angel Gabriel. It was a special Christmas episode of 'The Chosen.' Up to that point the only way that you could see this way to go to a theatre and buy a ticket. Unfortunately, our local theatre does not have it, you would have to go to Waycross or Valdosta. I was able, from the app to get a copy of it, and I showed. The underlying theme that Mary kept saying was the "people must know." I wholeheartedly agree. Luke became a messenger as he told the account of Mary and her visit from the Angel, of Joseph and his visit, of Mary visiting Elizabeth, and ultimately the arrival of the King of Kings, as He was born in the Little Town of Bethlehem, Bet meaning 'house of,' and Lechem – meaning 'bread.' The Bread of Life was born in the 'House of Bread.' Which was foretold by the Prophets – which we will celebrate this Friday at both the 5:30 PM and 11 PM services. These events are not to be kept secret, but they are watered down by some of the things in our culture. But we keep our focus where it needs to be and they need to be shared. The truth is that now, we are messengers - because people must know!