

Sermon for Sunday December 10 – Blue Christmas Service Luke 1:26 - 38 – The Angel comes to Mary

Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you O God, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

John Simmons tells about a grade school class that was putting on a Christmas play which included the story of Mary and Joseph coming to the inn. In that class was one little boy who wanted, very much to be Joseph. But when the parts were handed out, his biggest rival was given that part, and he was assigned to be the inn keeper instead.

He was really bitter about this, so during all the rehearsals he began to plot how to get even with his rival. Finally, the night of the performance, Mary and Joseph came walking across the stage. They knocked on the door of the inn, and the inn-keeper opened the door and asked them gruffly what they wanted.

Joseph answered, "We'd like to have a room for the night."

Suddenly the inn-keeper threw the door wide open and said, "Great, come on in and I'll give you the best room in the house."

Now, that wasn't in the script and for a few seconds the poor little kid, playing Joseph didn't know what to do. But finally the young Joseph had an idea. He stepped up to the innkeeper, and looked beyond him through the door that represented the inn. He made a big production of looking right and left. He stepped back out beside his "wife" and said, "No wife of mine is going to stay in a dump like this. Come on, Mary, let's go to the barn."///

There are times when Christmas doesn't go according to plan. There are times when you know what the script ought to be but somebody or something changes the lines on us. There are times when Christmas doesn't seem as cheerful and upbeat as we had hoped it would be:

- A loved one dies
- Friends/family move away
- We struggle with divorce
- We loose a job
- We may be suddenly faced with a serious illness.

Tonight we acknowledge that sometimes life changes the lines for us. And we are left feeling sad, lost and lonely in a season that calls for merry and bright.

But then let us think carefully about that very first Christmas.

It is the story of a teenage girl, pregnant with a child that is not her husband's.

It is the story of a child born in a dirty animal stall.

It is the story of innocent boys being killed by King Herod because Herod feared one of them might be the rival king the Wise Men spoke of.

It is the story of someone - sent into the world in peace - who was condemned to death.

It is the story of a light sent to shine in the darkness, and the world snuffed it out.

It is the story of God's never-ending, self-giving mercy which was rejected and condemned."

One could reasonably argue that that first Christmas was literally a “blue Christmas”. If all you looked at were the things that were wrong about the birth of Jesus that’s all you’d see – a very blue Christmas.

Mary sees things differently it seems – she does not see a blue Christmas but rather one filled with light – Mary sees God present and at work and that trusts that God is present in the mess.

Our Scripture lesson this evening comes at the beginning of the Christmas story for Luke. We can imagine Mary going about her daily chores. Perhaps she is dreaming of her pending wedding, perhaps planning for center pieces and canapés. Perhaps she is imaging the perfectly fitted dress and the smiling groom waiting for her at the altar. But the story tell us that suddenly everything changes - Mary is visited by an angel and told some disturbing news.

A baby would be born and this baby would be special – and in some mysterious way she would birth this child that would bring light and love to all the world.

The story tells us that Mary was confused by what was happening – scripture says she was perplexed and afraid. The story also tells us that the angel – the messenger from God assures her that she need not be afraid - what is happening is not a punishment but rather a gift and she is not alone - the angel tells her that though things sound pretty unbelievable - God will be with her.

Mary’s response is both faithful and practical. Mary trusts that God will be with her and she sings in celebration of God’s faithfulness. And then she gets on the first caravan out of town to see her cousin Elizabeth. Mary’s faith holds her at a difficult time and her extended family provides a concrete place for her to figure out how to proceed. We know the rest of the story – it is not an easy story but it ends with new life that transforms the world.

We have come this evening to this worship to acknowledge that life has not gone according to script. We are hurt and perhaps a little afraid. Our grief is fresh once again, our worry about the future is pressing.

Like Mary we are bit shaken but our response is both one of faith and practicality. Tonight we trust that God is with us; holding us in our time of grief, walking beside us in our worry, promising us new life and love. And like Mary we have payed attention to our practical needs as well; we have come here to be with those who understand – we have come to be a part of a community that welcomes us whatever we are feeling – and invites us to pray, to light a candle and to hear and speak words of hope.

Like Mary we turn to God and sing of faith and love, we turn to God and trust that light will come to our world once again.

May it be so.

Amen

Luke 1:26-38

²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." ²⁹But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³²He 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 ancestor David. ³³He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵The angel said to her, "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 Son of God. ³⁶And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.