

The Festival of the Annunciation of our Lord (Transferred)
St. Luke 1:26-38
March 22nd, 2017
Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Greenville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

You Will Conceive in Your Womb

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

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

This announcement from the angel Gabriel to the Blessed Virgin Mary is second announcement that Gabriel gives in the Gospel of St. Luke. The first announcement, you will remember, was to the father of St. John the Baptist—Zacharias. Both of these announcements are met with bewildered amazement. Both of these announcements ultimately are about the proclamation of a Savior being born. Zacharias receives an announcement that his son would be the forerunner of our Lord + Jesus Christ; he would prepare the way for the Lord. The Blessed Virgin Mary receives an announcement that to her would be born the Savior of mankind. One doubts the announcement—Zacharias—and he is unable to speak until the child is eight days old and he writes down that his name was to be called John. The Blessed Virgin Mary, on the other hand, believes what the angel Gabriel tells her even if she wonders out loud how this was to be since she was a virgin.

The Blessed Virgin Mary even confesses this in verse 38, *“Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.”* With these words, the Virgin Mary becomes the very first Christian catechumen. She is the very first to learn something about our Lord + Jesus, and believe it. And what does she learn? What does she believe and confess? That she will give birth to the Messiah—to the Christ.

This is why the angel calls her, *“highly favored.”* Literally the word means, “freely gifted one.” That is what it means to be highly favored, it means that the Virgin Mary has received a free gift; the free gift of a baby Boy; the free gift of the Messiah—the Anointed One. What that means is that anyone who has the Messiah, the Christ—our Lord + Jesus—is a “highly favored, freely gifted” person. That means we are the “highly favored, freely gifted” ones. We are the ones who have been given the free gift of God’s grace in His Son + Jesus.

All those who look to the Christ, and His coming are highly favored, and freely gifted with forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation. Now when we talk about free gifts in the Church we are talking about things that we don’t deserve, but we get anyway. We don’t deserve forgiveness. We don’t deserve eternal life. We don’t deserve salvation. There is nothing in us that is worthy enough for us to even present to God, so that we might say “here take this in exchange for my salvation.” In other words, we have nothing in ourselves that we can offer our Lord God that grants us salvation.

According to our keeping of the Law, we are all equal; we have all failed miserably to keep it. In fact, we break it daily. When it comes to works, we are no different than anybody else, because most people try to lead good moral lives; most people don't go around murdering and robbing people. In the same way, the conscience of an unbeliever works the same as a believer. Either it accuses them of wrongdoing, or it excuses them from wrongdoing. No human is different in that respect, their conscience is either going to tell them that something is wrong to do, or it is okay to do. The only difference that may exist between a believer and an unbeliever is that we fashion our morals after the Ten Commandments, whereas the unbeliever fashions his morals after whatever is popular in society at that particular time and place.

I hear it all the time about how some Christian, on account of the Old Adam dwelling in him, does something contrary to proper moral behavior, and then all of sudden, we hear from the world around us how Christians are not supposed to act that way. "We should know better." "The person is going against Christian morality." And then all the judging of that person starts. Yet, such amoral, and immoral behavior is all right whenever an unbeliever does it. I always find it ironic when unbelievers accuse Christians of acting contrary to themselves, when our society is doing it all the time. There is nothing wrong with leading a moral life. In fact, we should lead, good, holy and honorable lives in this world and in this life, just so the society is not offended because of our sinful behavior. However, leading a moral, good life is not what brings us salvation.

We are not going to find our salvation in how good of a life we lead, because God demands perfect obedience of the Law, and if you have failed in just one, small point, you have failed completely in keeping the whole Law. If you believe that you are going to be saved on account of your good works the only thing that you are going to receive on the Last Day is a one-way ticket to the eternal roasting pit of Hell, because you are in essence asking the Lord God to judge you according to your works; the good works that cannot be credited to you, if you do not have the Christ—the One Whom the angel Gabriel announces to the Blessed Virgin Mary as the Savior of the world. Our keeping of the Law cannot save us. But, through faith in Christ, we have put on the works of Christ, and we bear His works and His keeping of the Law.

This brings us back to where we started. Back with the announcement of the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary. We are the "highly favored, freely gifted ones." We have been freely gifted with the works of Christ. What that means, is that when we stand before the judgment seat of Christ on the Last Day, we need fear nothing, because Christ has already fulfilled everything necessary for us. When Christ asks us for a list of what we have done, and not done, He is going to exchange our list of works with His list of works. Therefore, because of Him, in the eyes of God the Father, we will have fulfilled the Law perfectly, without blot or blemish. We will be called perfect and holy in our Lord's eyes. And He will welcome us into Heaven, where we will join with all of the saints and angels and sing the eternal liturgy of the Lamb in His Kingdom, which has no end. There we will be with the whole multitude of Heaven, praising our Lord + Jesus, and singing, "*Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth, Heaven and Earth are full of Your glory.*" Even as we now do every Lord's Day.

All of this is because of the baby Boy promised to the Virgin Mary by the angel Gabriel. Just listen to what it says about this baby Boy, our Lord + Jesus, "*He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give 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.*" There will be no end to His kingdom—the kingdom that He won for you and I by His death on the cross; the kingdom that He purchased for us by His perfect fulfilling of the Law. But He could not die for us, and fulfill the Law for us, if He did not become a man like one us; if He was not born to the Blessed Virgin Mary. He has put Himself in our shoes. He bears our flesh. He knows our trials and temptations. He knows our suffering and pain. On account of all this, He shows His love for us by bearing our suffering and shame—our punishment—so that we might go free; that we might be called the "highly favored, freely gifted ones."

The Annunciation of our Lord is a festival tied to Christmas. In the midst of Lent—in the season when we are continuously looking at our sin and what drove our Lord + Jesus to the cross—we are reminded of Christmas and the birth of our Savior. We are given a glimpse of hope and joy. We are given a glimpse of the season in which we wait in eager expectation for the Son of God to come as a Baby in a manger. The Baby Who now has been announced to dwell in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Baby Who is the Holy One of God, Who is the Son of God. God made flesh. He is true God and true man for you and I. Just as the Virgin Mary had to wait nine months for her baby Boy to be born, we wait with her in eager expectation of our Lord + Jesus Christ to come as our Savior from sin, death and the devil. And now that He has conquered them, we wait eagerly for His return that He might take us to live with Him in Heaven for all eternity.

What a great announcement by the angel Gabriel! You can see why the Virgin Mary is “*deeply confused, and dialogued within herself*” over this greeting—she was not worthy in and of herself for such grace. However, she is the “highly favored, freely gifted” one. She is the first Christian catechumen, who hears that the promised Messiah has come, and believes it. We too, having heard and believed, have been granted faith in Him, and have been declared by God to be the “highly favored, freely gifted” ones. Now we can in faith join our confession to the Virgin Mary’s, “*Behold the servant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to Your word.*”

What does this Festival of the Annunciation of the Lord + Jesus Christ mean for us? This announcement of the angel Gabriel is an announcement of the Word of God. That according to His Word, we are declared free from sin, death and the devil. That according to His Word, we have forgiveness, life and salvation. That according to His Word, we have been Baptized, Absolved, and given to eat of His Body and Blood in bread and wine. And that according to His Word we have been given a Savior, born of the Virgin Mary, Who suffered and died for our salvation. Therefore, let us join our confession to Mary’s confession and say to our Lord, “*let it be to me according to Your word.*” The Lord God has granted us grace, for we are His “highly favored, freely gifted” ones and He bestows upon us forgiveness, life and salvation. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory! I will extol Thee, O Lord, and I will praise Thy Name forever and ever. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.