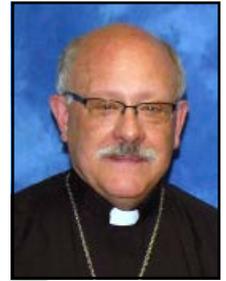




Hear the Word

from Pastor James N. McEachran



Gather... Encourage... Equip... Send...

Third Sunday of Advent

December 11, 2016

The Angel Speaks to Mary's DOUBT

Luke 1:26-38

Our theme: "Angel Speaks." We have been reading into the fear of Zechariah, the confusion of Joseph, the doubt of Mary, and, in a week, the curiosity of the Shepherds. Seeing how one lives in the world where God is making a grace note statement in the coming of Jesus, Son of God, Son of Man.

Recall the last two?

1) "Fear" as Zechariah, priest at Temple, serves the Lord. A good man, married to a faithful woman, Elizabeth from the lineage of Aaron, the brother of Moses. No mean couple, these two, "righteous before God, living blamelessly" keeping the commandments and law of the Lord. Oh, but they had no children... Elizabeth was barren... two old crocks, "getting on in years." [Lest you forget, to be barren would have been viewed as a disgrace. Far from a blessing with NO offspring!]

Serving, he is met by an angel. Trembling in fear, he hears the angel's words, "Chill, stop fearing, your prayer is answered, a son is coming, name him 'John.' Joy and gladness are yours and others will rejoice too. Great in the Lord's sight, full of the Spirit. Like Elijah, he will make "ready a people prepared for the Lord."

Fear abated as a speechless priest goes home. All is well as this old couple waited for the day and the coming of the son, named, John, who would one day truly prepare the way of the Lord. All well and Elizabeth said, "This is what the Lord has done for me when he looked with favor on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among the people."

2). Joseph. He has found a good woman and they are engaged. A binding in which Joseph and Mary would have been legally married. Any notion of unfaithfulness would be considered as adultery and could be dissolved only by divorce or death.

Wait! He finds that Mary is expecting baby. What to do? A time of confusion in which a decision needs to be, must be made. Being "a righteous man," a decision has to be made, a "just" decision to divorce her quietly. And he sleeps.

That angel again, Matthew gives the spoiler to the reader, by the Holy Spirit. This is all God's doing and the message is pretty clear: "Joseph, son of the promise to David, don't be confused, get rid of your fear, take Mary as your wife because "what has been brought to life in her happened, by the Holy Spirit."

So, out of confusion comes clarity as Joseph hears, "Baby boy. By the Holy Spirit. Name him Jesus, YAHWEH saves. Now get this: "YAHWEH, saves, "his people from their sins."

I find the whole of Matthew and Luke's birth narratives to be so remarkably simple that my heart begins to accommodate the truth FOR YOU, for me that God has a plan, works the plan, and the plan for our salvation is fail safe!

Both Zechariah and Joseph did as they were told, pushed out of their fear, out of their confusion that they were called to respond faithfully to their life's calling---to be a priest, and the carpenter adopted father. To protect their sons, hold their family close, until the day of the meeting of John and Jesus at the Jordan for the baptism of EMMANUEL, God with us. "Joseph's obedience allows Jesus to be adopted as a true Son of David; it is Mary's role that allows Jesus to be born Son of God." (M. Eugene Boring)

Today, Mary's doubt. Gabriel is working overtime and this time to a young woman who hears that she is truly favored. Imagine her hearing "The Lord is with you." She doubted what it meant, but hears that a son is to be born from her, this woman engaged to Joseph (whose visitation is recorded in Matthew's Gospel), yet to share the intimacy of the marriage. She hears the name "Jesus." But, more so the path for He is to be Son of the Most High, heir to the throne of David, ruler of the house of Jacob, His a kingdom forever.

Imagine it! Some hold she may have been about 14 years old. Her question is kind of obvious, "Huh?" And, once again, as to Joseph, the work of the Holy Spirit who was at the beginning of creation and now comes to Mary for the sake of that creation. The One who created the sun that shines conceives the Son who will reign and redeem, given FOR YOU, FOR ME.

Here, it seems, is the point of it all...think of the sweep of grace, the power of the promise, the clarity of the care of God in this whole drama we are sharing again in this time of Advent.

Zechariah's fear abated as he and Elizabeth wait; Joseph's confusion unraveled with the assurance that all will be well.

And as Elizabeth becomes the mentor to Mary, as they all wait and mark the days, Mary hears "For nothing/NO-thing is impossible with God."

Promise Graciously Given is met with this Faith-Filled Response: "Her am I, the servant of the Lord, now let it be to me, THE SERVANT OF THE LORD." And this quartet of blessing seems to know that ALL WILL BE WELL.

I have been thinking about Zechariah and Elizabeth, about Joseph and Mary...so few verses and we place so much into those lives and their benefit to us even today. Lives interrupted. Lives renewed. With announcement of the messenger who God sends, who is in the presence of God, that God might be present with us.

I sometimes think I take it all for granted in the busyness of life. A calling, a family, the work of each of our days. And the times we live in, not unlike those of the time of Jesus, the Pax Romana, as it is called, same things then as now, but we just hear about it all too soon and often in what one writer calls "The Age of Acceleration." No time to take time in time to pause...to breathe, to connect, to enjoy just the moment that God gives to us, to receive again the child who is to become our Savior, our Lord, our walked with us on the journey.

Soon and very soon, Jesus is coming again. In the Word, at the Table, but perhaps most certainly in the Sharing of the Peace. In that place where in the midst of our brokenness, our relationships not always clear, we pause to show that we are One in the Spirit, One in the Lord.

Perhaps that is the kind of peace that finally entered the lives of our faithful four who would hold their sons and one day turn them loose to do the work of God.

In the same way, we are loosed to do the work of God. For Advent is our time to prepare, to repair, and to be open to the newness Christ brings. May God continue these next few days and on the Eve of Christmas may we share what is truly means that with God all things are possible, and that God in Christ will never let go of us. Not for one single moment.

Gladly we praise him,
love and adore him,
give ourselves to him
in Bethlehem.

Even so, come Lord Jesus, AMEN.