

December 18, 2011
Advent 4

"The Miracle of the Virgin Birth"

LUKE 1:26-38

In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." ²⁹ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰ But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. ³¹ You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end." ³⁴ "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" ³⁵ The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. ³⁶ Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. ³⁷ For nothing is impossible with God." ³⁸ "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

Someone asked Larry King, who is Jewish, whom he would interview if he could interview any person from the past. King said he would want to interview Jesus Christ, and the first question he would ask was, "Were you really born of a virgin?" Several years ago *Newsweek* magazine reported the results of a survey that said 80% of the American people believe Jesus was born of a virgin. Every Sunday we confess our faith by saying Jesus was "born of the Virgin Mary."

We belief in the virgin birth, but how much does this miracle impact our lives? Here you are in the last week before Christmas. There is shopping that needs to be done, food to be prepared, family to welcome home and even cards to send out for some of us. Could it happen that we who believe in the miracle of Jesus' virgin birth might miss out on the blessings of that miracle because we are too focused on other things less important?

Imagine for a moment that you lived in a closed box such as this where all you knew about Christmas was giving presents, having parties, putting up decorations and getting together with your family. But then God breaks through into your life and opens your eyes to see and heart to believe the miracle of Jesus' birth. Then the Lord keeps breaking into your life again and again and overwhelming you with the miraculous. That's what he did for Mary and that's what we want the Lord to do for us as well.

We are amazed at the way the Lord speaks to us

Isn't it amazing how the Lord sent the angel Gabriel to tell her she was chosen to be the mother of our Savior? "In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel, to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph." Here is Mary,

living in her little box, thinking every day about living a new life with her future husband Joseph. Suddenly an angel appears to her and brings a message into her life that totally changes her plans. God speaks to us today not through angels, but through the miracle of his Word that totally changes our lives and brings miracles to us and leads us to believe in them.

The angel said to Mary: "Greetings, you who are highly favored. The Lord is with you." The word for highly favored is the same word the Lord speaks to us in Ephesians 1:6 where it speaks about "God's glorious grace which he has freely given us in the one he loves." The Lord chose Mary to be the mother of Jesus, not because she was better than other people, but only because of his grace and mercy, just as he has chosen you to believe in Jesus only because of his grace and mercy and nothing in you.

How does Mary react to the message? At first she is troubled and afraid. "Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting his might be." If an angel suddenly appeared to us here in this church service, we would be afraid at first because we would feel a deep sense of our sinfulness and unworthiness in the presence of one of God's holy and pure angels who reflect his glory. But then the angel speaks to Mary and calms her fears with the words, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God." Think of all the times God has spoken to you here in his word and brought peace and comfort into your life.

Do you ever feel trapped and even overwhelmed by the problems in this life, the way things are going in the world today, or even by the struggles you have daily against your sinful flesh and Satan's temptations? But then God's Word breaks into your life and tells you that you are highly favored. I think of those 33 Chilean miners who were trapped underground. At first, there seemed to be no hope. They were totally surrounded by rock with no way to escape. But then the rescue teams were able to drill a shaft into the place where they were staying and provide them with food, and water and soap and toothpaste and medicine, and MP3 players with the Bible recorded on them which they listen to daily. The Word of God changed their lives and brought them close to Jesus their Savior.

The best moments in your life and mine have come when our God comes to us here in his Word and tells us not to be afraid and not to worry. The best moments of this Christmas season will be the times when you hear the message of Jesus birth, or read it, or have some Christmas carol bring you close to the miracle of Jesus' birth.

We are amazed at how Jesus is Lord and God

Mary's life was never the same after she heard the angel tell her about the child that would be born through her. "You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name of Jesus." Babies are born every day in the hospitals here on the Central Coast. Every baby is a miracle in its own way as it develops in the womb from the time of conception and then comes into the world with its body parts functioning. Mary's baby was to have the name Jesus, a common name in those days similar to the name Joshua. The name Jesus comes from the Hebrew word, "Yishua" the Deliverer.

But this was no ordinary child with the popular name of Yishua. The angel says, "He will

be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.” If you look at the banners in the front of the church you will see the names of Jesus’ descendants recorded from the gospels of Matthew and Luke. In the gospel of Luke the list of names starts out with Jesus as the son of Joseph and then ends with the words, “the son of Adam and the son of God.” Both Mary and Joseph were descendants of King David. Jesus was a descendant of David and but also the Son of God. When Mary first felt life in your womb, she believed the miracle that this child was the Son of God, the Son of the Most High, her Lord and God from all eternity. When she nursed Jesus, she believed she held the creator of the universe in her arms. That’s the great miracle of the Christian faith. John 1 says, “The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” So the popular song says, “Mary did you know that when you kissed your little child, you kissed the face of God.”

Would you not agree with me that the ordinary things of life inside this box we call life are in desperate need of this amazing, extraordinary miracle of Jesus coming into this world as one of us yet remaining our Lord and God? It is tough to put up with the challenges life brings our way. There are the struggles with your health, the struggles with your jobs, and the struggles with putting up with what is going on in the world. Then there is the daily struggle of the sinful flesh or sinful nature that leads us to sinful thoughts of anger, greed, lack of faith and trust, and lack of love for people. Because Satan is so powerful inside this box we call life, you feel like crying out to the Lord as loudly as you can, “Lead us not into temptation.”

But then we hear the good news that this Jesus, God’s Son, one of us, who is going to establish the kingdom of David forever. “The Lord will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever.” Can you not hear the strains of the Hallelujah Chorus, “And he shall reign forever, and ever...” There in Bethlehem’s manger lies the King who comes into your life, this miserable little box we call life, and rescues you from your sin and eternal death and destruction. He kneels before you and offers you the treasures of his eternal love that he earned for you by his perfect life lived on this earth and perfect sacrifice at the cross. And so we sing at Christmas, “Nail, spear, will pierce him through, the cross he’ll bear for me and you.”

We are amazed at how Jesus was conceived

Mary wonders how she can have a baby without being married to a man and having relations with him. “How will this be since I am a virgin?” The angel astounds her and us with the miraculous intervention of the Holy Spirit. “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the most high will overshadow you. So, the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.” The Holy Spirit was there at creation hovering over the water bringing life into the world. The Holy Spirit was the one who would create the conception in the womb of Mary. We confess him as the Lord and Giver of life. There was no seed of the man involved. Isaiah predicted it. “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.”

Because of this miraculous conception, Jesus did not receive Adam’s sin passed down to him as we did. Adam’s sin sure created a lot of destruction and chaos in this little box of life in which we live. We are conceived and born in Adam’s sin. “Surely, I was sinful from birth, sinful from time my mother conceived me.” We are born in this box we call life,

always trying to make excuses for ourselves as Adam and Eve did. We feel so helpless as Jeremiah tells us, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" I am responsible to a holy and righteous God in this box I call life on this earth. The Lord breaks through and convinces us there is no hope of being saved by what we try to do to make up for what was done wrong. Then we look at Jesus. He lies in a manger in Bethlehem. Mary holds him in her arms. She would experience first hand the joy of raising a child that was not corrupted in her womb, a child who lived a perfect life for us, so he could credit us with his righteousness.

We are amazed at the miracle that believes this is true

How did Mary respond to the miracles that came into her life? The angel tells her "Nothing is impossible with God." Humbly and joyfully she says, "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said." She accepts the impossible from the hand of her Lord. This past week we went through these verses about the virgin birth with the Bible study group that meets at Santa Maria Terrace. I asked them to nod their heads "Yes" if they believed the miracle of Jesus birth, God's Son become one of us, through Virgin Birth. They all nodded their head "Yes." When you nod your head yes to these miracles we have seen here this morning, thank the Lord he has given you the miracle of faith to believe this is all true. Amen.