

December 21, 2014
Advent 4

"Holy Spirit, Give Us a 'Mary' Christmas!"

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.

In the Nicene Creed we confess that the Holy Spirit is the Lord and Giver of Life. The Holy Spirit is the Lord and Giver of life who was involved in creating the world in which we live. "The Spirit of God was hovering over the waters." The Holy Spirit is the Lord and Giver who caused Jesus to be conceived in the womb of Mary. The Holy Spirit is the Lord and Giver of life who created faith in your heart when you were spiritually dead.

Jesus said the Holy Spirit is also our Comforter who teaches us all things and brings all things to our memory. The Holy Spirit's convinced you to believe that a tiny baby born in Bethlehem is your Lord and your God from all eternity. The Holy Spirit will be active in our lives this week to raise our level of joy in Jesus' birth to give us a truly Merry Christmas in the fullest sense of the Word.

This morning we want to ask for a special blessing of the Holy Spirit as we look at this amazing appearance of the angel Gabriel announcing to Mary that she would give birth to God's Son, the Savior of the world. So we ask our Comforter, the Holy Spirit to give us not just a "Merry Christmas" (Merry) but a "Mary Christmas" (MARY).

Come to us with your Word

Oh, how the life of Mary changed when the Word of the Lord came to her through the angel Gabriel. "In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary."

It seems so ordinary does it not. Here is this young woman named Mary engaged to a man named Joseph a carpenter in the small town of Nazareth. You can well imagine that Mary's mind was often filled with thoughts about her future with Joseph. Even though they were engaged she had

not yet had relationships with Joseph her future husband. She was still a virgin.

Oh, how life changes when God breaks into our often ordinary world with his extraordinary Word. "The angel went to her and said, 'Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.'" Mary was highly favored. God was about to pour out his grace to her in a very special way. Notice the angel does not address her as "Mary Full of Grace" or "Mary Queen of Heaven." The emphasis is not on Mary, it is on God's grace to Mary. The Lord would be with Mary in a special way, creating life in her womb, helping her through the tough times when people looked at her in disdain for being pregnant before she was married, and even being with her when she made the long trek to Jerusalem nine months pregnant.

Think of what a special Christmas it would be if God sent an angel to personally appear to you and read to you the Christmas account in Luke two or the words of John 3:16 or the words of John 1. Oh, how I wish God would send his angels to people I know who no longer kneel at the manger in Bethlehem to worship their Lord and Savior. Surely that would convince them that there is so much more to Christmas than just family and friends and good food and giving gifts.

Mary had big changes coming up in her life as she planned for her marriage to her beloved Joseph. But then the Lord told her about bigger plans he had for her. Whatever plans you have in your life, the Lord has bigger plans for you. The Holy Spirit wants to bring you closer to the miraculous birth of his Son and what this means for you. Is it too much to ask the Holy Spirit to use some verse of Scripture or some words from a hymn or a message on a Christmas card to bring us closer to the blessings we have in Jesus? Certainly not! And is it too much to ask the Holy Spirit to come to us and give us a "Mary Christmas?" Certainly not!

Come to us with the miracle of Jesus' birth

At first Mary is troubled by this greeting. "Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be." She is greatly troubled. She is afraid. She is no different than the shepherds on the fields of Bethlehem. She is a sinner in the presence of one of God's holy angels. Gabriel has soothing words for her. "Do not be afraid." How often don't we find comfort in the words of Scripture that tell us not to be afraid. The angel told the frightened shepherds, "Do not be afraid, I bring you good news of great joy." The Son of God lying in a manger takes away our fears. This is good news of great joy. Everything is going to be OK.

Now she hears the amazing words about becoming pregnant and giving birth to the very Son of God. "Mary you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and his kingdom will never end."

Oh, put yourself in Mary's place. Every time she felt the baby Jesus kicking in her womb, she believed that this was God's Son from all eternity because the angel said her baby would be the very Son of the Most High God. Mary was there when the shepherds worshiped Jesus as their Lord and God because the angel had told them that he was Christ the Lord. Mary was there when the wise men knelt down and worshipped him and opened their gifts for him. Here I am boldly confessing with John, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

Mary does not have to think about a name for this special baby miraculously conceived in her womb. The angel told her, "You are to give him the name Jesus." Later another angel appeared to

Joseph and told him, "She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." Jesus means Savior. There is Jesus the little boy playing in the streets of Nazareth. He is living the perfect life I never lived as a child. There is Jesus with his body badly beaten and dying on a cross to pay for my sins. There is Jesus with the nail marks till in his hands after his resurrection from the dead, the supreme evidence that God the Father asked the sacrifice he made for me. There is Jesus God sitting on his throne and building a kingdom that lasts forever. There is Jesus the Shepherd meticulously caring for his sheep and loving them with intense personal love. Someday soon, I hope, this child born from Mary with the name of Jesus will come in clouds of glory and take us home to be with him forever.

Oh, how we want a "Mary Christmas." We want the Holy Spirit to help us be there with Mary and celebrate with her the great truth that this tiny baby in her womb is the Son of God. We want the Holy Spirit to help us be there with her as she holds the baby in her arms and tells the shepherds, "This is Jesus." We want the Holy Spirit to take us to the cross and help us kneel with Mary as she hears her son cry out from the cross, "It is finished." I am not ashamed of singing the Christmas carol on Christmas Eve with the words, "Nail, spear will pierce him through, The cross he'll bear for me and you."

Come to us with the miracle of the Virgin Birth

Mary wants to know how she can give birth to a child, who is a baby and God, without knowing a man intimately. "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" Even though Mary and Joseph had been engaged to be married they did not sleep together. She was pure. She was a virgin. Listen to Gabriel's explanation on how this miracle would happen. "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." As further proof the angel points Mary to the example of her cousin Elizabeth who had conceived a child in her old age after she had been barren all her life. And to dispel all doubt the angel reminds her, "For nothing is impossible without God."

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?" Be thankful the Holy Spirit has led you to believe that nothing is impossible with God. You have the faith of Mary who said, "May it be to me as you have said."

The Holy Spirit is the Lord and Giver of life. He created the conception in the womb of Mary without the seed of a man. 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. We are conceived and born in Adam's sin. "Surely, I was sinful from birth, sinful from time my mother conceived me." We feel so helpless as Jeremiah tells us, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" 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 want a Mary Christmas. We want the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life to remind us once again that nothing is impossible with God. Amen.