

Third Sunday in Advent (Lessons and Carols)

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Date: 17 December 2023

Preacher: Rev. Daniel Avitan

[0 : 00] Father in heaven, we thank you that we have your word, that you have revealed it to us, and that Jesus was not some plan B, but was from the very beginning.

We thank you that we can go through your scripture and hear the prophecies, and then read that the prophecies were fulfilled. Therefore, Lord, we can be confident that what is yet to come will be indeed fulfilled.

So, Lord, we look to you and we thank you. In Jesus' name, amen. We will briefly look at our seventh reading.

This is the reading that Jack read. It is the Annunciation, Luke chapter 1, 26 to 38. This is the story where the angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she will miraculously be with child, and that her son will be the savior of the world.

This child will be unlike any child that has been born, either before or since. For this child will be fully human, but also fully God.

[1 : 13] This is a short sermon, more of like a homily. There's too much to cover in this section. But I want to take a look at two big aspects of the incarnation, of God becoming man and dwelling amongst us.

We'll understand in these two big points how the incarnation really is our hope. Not just a hope, but the hope that we have. And we'll look specifically at the condescension of God in the incarnation, and also the presence of God in the incarnation.

So we'll begin with the condescension. Bit of a story. My first week living in Ottawa, I moved here in the fall of 2006, and a friend of mine who grew up here, he invited me to join him on a basketball camp to teach some kids.

And the camp wasn't in Ottawa. It was in Mysticini, which is a Cree community in northern Quebec, kind of really close to James Bay. So we hopped on a flight from Dorval to Shibugamu, and then we took a two-hour, around two-hour, like the worst dirt road trip into Mysticini.

And it was a good time. I was there with one of my good friends. But also, it turned out that two players from the Toronto Raptors were going to be there as well. They weren't like stars.

[2 : 42] One guy, he would be on the Raptors for, like, I don't know, five minutes, and then bounce out of the league. The other guy was a rookie. So it's not like I was starstruck.

But nevertheless, here they were. But one thing we noticed about these guys, and this is no judgment against them. I'm sure they were there because of contractual obligations.

But it was very clear they didn't want to be there. They were condescending, in a sense, to us. They were fulfilling their obligations, and they left early, actually.

So again, no judgment. I don't know where these guys were at. This was their off-season. Maybe they just needed extra rest. But it was very clear that we were beneath them, and this camp was beneath them.

They were condescending to us, and we all knew it. Luke chapter 1, 26 to 38, tells a story about God, the Son of God, condescending to us, not just a few of us, not just a community in Nazareth, a woman in Nazareth, but to the whole human race.

[3 : 51] God, the Son of God, who created everything, chose to descend and take up to Him human flesh, remaining fully God, but also becoming fully man.

God did not command us to ascend to Him, but decided to condescend to us, to descend to us. And unlike the basketball players from the Toronto Raptors, He did it out of love, not out of obligation, not because we somehow twisted His cosmic arm, we didn't force God, we didn't put Him in a bind so that He had to, under contractual obligation, descend into humanity.

But because of His great love for us, He condescended to us. He moved into our loneliness, taking up residence by taking up our humanity.

But it's not just that God, the Son of God, came down from heaven to earth, but ended up in a seat of power.

It's not like He was conceived in Jerusalem, or Rome, or any other place that you could use as, in a sense, a beachhead to launch out your ministry.

[5 : 12] He went to Nazareth. Nazareth, a dinky town, far from bustling. In fact, later on, Jesus will be, He will be mocked from being from Nazareth.

What good can come from Nazareth? Not only that, Mary herself was not influential. She was a peasant woman. She didn't have much means.

She came from humble means. She is not royalty, and she did not deal in great power. She did not have much agency. And yet, God came down to her.

It was a part of His condescension, His descent, so that we did not have to ascend. You can feel the shock of Mary. We see this in verse 28 to 29 of verse 1.

It says this, Greetings, O favored one. The Lord is with you. But Mary was greatly troubled at the saying and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.

[6 : 19] So you see, God descends into the lowliest possible region, into the lowest possible rung, socially speaking, and He comes not as some kind of full-grown man with this developed, incredible intellect or huge propensity for war.

He comes as a child in the womb of a woman who is poor. In a time when archaeologists would, they suppose that there was basically about a 50% infant mortality rate.

One in two children likely died in infancy. And this is the place where God comes. 2 Corinthians chapter 8 verse 9 says this, Friends, in this manner, God the Father chose to send God the Son and the Holy Spirit was at work through it all to take on flesh in the person of Jesus Christ, to seek and save the lost.

He comes to inaugurate His kingdom in this way. The kingdom of Christ that begins at the Annunciation is a kingdom that we read will have no end.

So it seems, in a sense, the most unlikely scenario that could have possibly worked out may be impossible for it to work out. And yet, this is what God chooses.

[8 : 11] There's no way that Mary or the chief priests or the Pharisees could somehow claim that they had a part to play in redemption. It is all God and all of His choosing.

And this is fantastic news for us. He does not, again, demand us to ascend. But He recognizes that we are poor. So in a sense, the incarnation, the condescension of God to us, the descent from God, the Son of God, to earth, it is God's recognition and His message to us that we truly are poor and broken and unable to pull ourselves up from the mess that we find ourselves in.

And He knows that the only way that we can have redemption to mend the chasm between us and Him is impossible.

So He does the impossible. And He gifts us with His very presence. And this leads to the second aspect of the incarnation. It is God's presence among us.

We read in verse 32, verse 33, And the angel said to Mary, Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

[9 : 34] And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus. He 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 father David, that He will reign over the house of Jacob forever.

And of His kingdom, there will be no end. In response, Mary asks the angel in verse 34, How will this be since I am a virgin?

If we had more time, we'd dig into this. But just briefly, we see that in this question, God does not command some kind of stupid blind faith.

that God delights in a curiosity for the truth that wants to know Him. We can dig into God's scriptures and not take it necessarily at face value if there is a pebble in your shoe or something that's kind of gnawing at the back of your head.

But He welcomes us to seek Him. And He says, If we seek Him, He will be found. Continues on in verse 35, And the angel answered her, The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.

[10:55] Therefore, the child to be born will be called Holy, the Son of God. Notice that the work of the Holy Spirit here is active in a similar way that we see the Holy Spirit act in creation.

In the opening verses of Genesis 1, it says that the Spirit hovers over the formless void, the formless seas, the formless earth. So what we see, in a sense, what Gabriel is saying is that the conception of the Virgin is no less a work of divine creation than creation itself.

You and I create from readily available materials. But God creates from nothing. And in the womb of Mary, we are seeing God create, the Spirit of God create, out of nothing.

In the same way He created the earth out of nothing. When it was formless and void. This also tells us that our redemption was no small feat and required something on par with creation itself.

Our redemption was not a matter of a small tweak here or there. The right kind of political or financial system. It was not a matter of let's try harder.

[12:17] But required a creative miracle that was parallel to creation itself. God has gone to great lengths to redeem and to restore and to mend.

And this is what we see in the incarnation. Friends, make no mistake, salvation and redemption cannot be wrought by your own hand. It is by an act of divine miracle and divine miracle alone. It's a miracle of creation where God's very presence comes to reside with us. Our Emmanuel, God with us. So this brings us to the second aspect of God's presence.

Not just hovering over Mary in a creative sense, but also it reminds us of God's presence covering or overshadowing the tabernacle in the Exodus account or on Mount Sinai when God is getting the law.

God's personal presence in those two examples and elsewhere. It speaks to God giving protection and conveying a truly connected intimate relationship with his people.

[13:30] It is a sign that God is among us and that he delights to be among us. Speaks to God's faithfulness and personal relationship that he unilaterally initiates with his people.

So in the incarnation, God's very presence becomes so personally and deeply connected to humanity that he doesn't just dwell with us kind of over there, but dwells with us as one of us taking again up our humanity into his divinity.

Listen, going into this, God has been silent for some centuries. God has not spoken to his people and the angst for the Messiah to come was up to an 11.

Is God coming? Will he come? Maybe he's forgotten about us. God, come. Send your Messiah once again as people were waiting for his salvation.

Just when things seem bleakest, he speaks one more promising everything that we need for salvation in the most impossible way, an unlikely way.

[14:49] But we must remember, as the angel tells Mary in verse 37, nothing is impossible with God. Even our sin and brokenness, even the estrangement we have with God and one another that is impossible for us to mend on our own is not impossible for God.

It's a wonderful reminder and it can become so often a cliché thing to say. Nothing's impossible for God. But friends, nothing's impossible for our God.

And this is the story of the Annunciation, the Incarnation, where God took on flesh and became one of us.

Friends, this beautiful truth was announced in Mary 2,000 years ago. and it is announced to us afresh today. Thank you. Thank you.