

Receiving the Gift in Faith

4th Sun. in Advent – 12/24/23 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Dan. 9:20-27 & Lk. 1:26-38 Past. Keith Besel

A Monologue (Note: Sermon hymn - The “Magnificat”)

Introduction

✘ What a beautiful song. What magnificent words of praise to God!

→ Do you know whose words those are that you just sang? Do you know what it is that prompted those words to first be uttered? You see, that song is especially dear to me because they are the words of Mary, the mother of Jesus; the words that she sang to her relative Elizabeth in response to a very special message – a message which I had the privilege to proclaim.

✘ I am Gabriel – the angel Gabriel. We angels were created by God, just as you humans are. But we are created differently from you; for the special and specific purpose of praising God and ministering to those people in His church.

→ The word “angel” means “messenger”. And as an angel, I am just that, a messenger for God and from God. So I am excited to proclaim God's message every chance I get. John the Baptizer – he was a messenger of God too, but of course he was fully human with flesh and blood. So, whenever someone, whether they are a spirit like me, or a human like you, proclaims God's message, we then serve Him as His messengers.

✘ Those of us who are God's good angels in heaven have been blessed with some very special messages to proclaim in history. We've been present at many of the key events in God's kingdom.

→ Here are some of those instances: at Mt. Sinai when God gave His law to Moses; at the announcement of Jesus' conception in Mary; at the announcement of your Savior's birth to the shepherds. We also announced His resurrection, and two of us proclaimed the promise of our Lord's return at the end of the age to the disciples when Jesus ascended to heaven.

→ Because we've been given some very special messages to proclaim, many people have tried to actually elevate us higher than they should. I have been especially privileged because God made me His special messenger to reveal and proclaim His purpose concerning the Messiah and His kingdom. I suppose that's why one of your earthly church bodies named me as the patron of telegraphy and television. I mean, they even have groups that encourage people to pray every day to us. It's so disappointing to see people do this, because then they're acting like they are God.

→ But friends, only God can tell me who or what I am to serve or guard! We can't make those decisions. We are merely God's agents. Besides, only God answers prayers. I can't do anything about a prayer until God first gives me the power and the command to act upon it. So, hear me well, only God is worthy of praise and worship!

I. Daniel

✘ But enough about me, I have another purpose – to give you a message; a message from God's Word. Let me tell you about a few of the missions that God gave to me. They're special to me because they helped reveal God's plan and promises to His people on earth regarding their...your salvation.

✘ The first one was when I was sent to Daniel. Daniel was taken captive to Babylon when he was a young man. Even in his youth he displayed a great faith in God. Even the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, noticed Daniel's faith.

→ Yahweh gave Daniel the ability to interpret many of the king's dreams concerning the future of the world and the coming of the Messiah. But then, even Daniel began having dreams that troubled him. That's where I come in. God sent me to help Daniel understand his dreams.

→ Then there was the time when Daniel was praying to God. I know, sometimes you don't think God hears or answers your prayers, but trust me, "you are wrong"! Before Daniel was even done with his prayer, God sent me to Daniel with the answer. You see, Daniel believed the promise Jeremiah had prophesied that said that the captivity of God's people would last 70 years and then they would be released.

→ Well, this time was almost up. So Daniel was asking God to be merciful and bring His people's release about. I appeared to Daniel and told him God's plan for His people. It would take too long for me to tell you the whole plan here, though I know I heard your pastor read it to you earlier from Scripture. But I'll tell you this much: there would be another period of time in which the promised Messiah would come, and then He would be killed. This would be the beginning of the era that you are in right now. During this time, as you know well, Satan would establish a covenant that promised terror and violence.

✘ But here's the great part; because of Jesus' coming and death, God now has in store a day when all of His wrath will be poured out on Satan. That will be Satan's day of reckoning, when all of God's promises will have come true. Satan's power will be utterly destroyed and He will no longer be free to torment those who believe in the Triune God. It's then that the guilt of God's children will all be cancelled.

II. Zechariah

✘ The next mission where God sent me was even more exciting. When I heard the message God wanted me to proclaim, I knew that the physical coming of the Messiah to earth was getting closer.

→ God sent me again to answer a prayer. And again, I arrived even before the prayer was finished. You see, a priest, named Zechariah, was in the temple burning incense and praying for God's people. It was great! He was praying for the redemption of Israel. And guess what? I got to tell him that God was going to answer his prayer just as he had requested. And, you all know God, He not only gives you the things you need but He also gives you more than you even asked for. That's what He was going to do for Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth.

→ I was ordered to tell Zechariah that not only would redemption come to Israel but that he and his wife – who were both quite old by human standards, would bear a son and he would serve an important role in preparing God's people for the coming of their redemption. This son would turn many of God's people back to Him and he would have the power of Elijah. I told Zechariah that his son would be a great joy and delight, not only for him and his wife, but for many others as well.

✘ I was so excited...and then it happened: this priest, a man of God, actually refused to believe my message. He said he needed a sign of some type to confirm my message! Now be honest, how many times have you wanted a sign to confirm some truth from God? Man, if there's one thing that hurts an angel, it's when someone refuses to believe the message he brings. I mean, these are God's words...about God's promises!

→ I'll bet some of you have had that happen to you before. You share the great message of Jesus and His forgiveness for all people and some people just won't believe you. I'll even bet this has made it so that you might now be afraid to continue sharing God's message of love. You know that's Satan's plan, right? Oh, he's so infuriating, because he even masquerades as

one of us; as an angel of light and he tricks people into believing his false messages...as if they were from God. It's so disgusting.

→ And to think, he used to be one of us! I can hardly wait until the day when Christ comes to bind him up once and for all. Anyway my friends, whenever you feel afraid or too intimidated to spread God's message, remember: just as it is with me, your message is not from you, but from God! You are His children now, not Satan's. Any message from God comes with God's authority.

- ✘ That's what I told Zechariah. I said, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news" (Lk. 1:19). However, I had to tell him the bad news too. He wanted a sign – God was going to give him a sign all right, but not the type that he wanted. Because of his unbelief, he would be unable to speak until the promise from God came true. That's how great our God is. Even while He punishes, He is still merciful. He still kept the promise of sending salvation. And its way would be prepared by Zechariah's son whom you call John the Baptizer.

III. Mary

- ✘ Now for my best mission of all: Every angel wanted to be the one who would have the opportunity to proclaim the message about the coming of the Messiah. We've always been in awe of God's great plan for the redemption of the world. So imagine my excitement when God gave me the privilege of announcing the actual promise that the Savior was on His way.

→ I was sent to a young lady, named Mary. She was a virgin, just as Isaiah had foretold, and she was not especially important by earthly standards. I greeted her and comforted her by telling her that she had found favor with God. I told her she would become pregnant and have a son whom she was to name "Jesus." That means, "Yahweh saves" in Hebrew.

→ And then I told her all of the promises concerning this son she was going to have. He would be great and would be called "the Son of the Most High." In other words, He is God, becoming human. He would be the ultimate revelation of God, in the flesh! Because of this, he would be the only one ever that could actually be a "go-between" – between mankind and God. As fully God and fully man, only He understands your situation and also God. Just think of that!

→ God would give Him the throne of His human ancestor, David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob - forever! What a comfort. His kingdom will never ever end! Do you see now, why I can't wait for Jesus to come again? What a set of promises.

- ✘ So, how do those compare to the promises that the world gives you for Christmas? Promises of new toys, new clothes and lots of great food; time off of work and school; time to spend with family – these are nice and they are gifts from God also, but how can they really compare with the promises given to us in Mary's baby? Can they compare with undeserved forgiveness; with life in paradise - forever?

- ✘ I knew this was going to be a pretty tough message for Mary to believe. But remember, Mary had found favor with God. He had already given her the faith to accept this message. But she was still a little puzzled and asked me for an explanation – not a sign like Zechariah did. After all, Mary was being asked to believe that she would conceive a baby without ever having had a husband.

→ Because her own reason could not grasp all of this, all she could do was cling to the Word alone. I told her how the Holy Spirit would come upon her and how she would become pregnant by the power of God. I also told her that Elizabeth was pregnant at that time in her old age. Then I confirmed the faith she had already showed when I said, "Nothing will be impossible with God" (Lk. 1:38). I've seen it, "Nothing is impossible with God!"

✘ Now what about you? Are you able to believe these same promises about your Savior? Even in your world, your reason and experience will not be able to explain how any of this could happen. I've seen it throughout history – so many people have not believed this message and these promises. Can you?

➔ Sadly, many have twisted this truth so that they actually trust in Mary instead of her Son. Like Mary though, you can't accept these things unless you have first been given faith by God. It must be God and His Word alone, with His promises that you rely upon, even when you don't understand how they come about.

Conclusion

✘ Mary – she knew her place before God. Just look at the words to the song you sang before I started talking. She realized that she was a humble servant and that she was forgiven because “He alone who shows such might has done amazing things” for her. Her song shows it – she recognized God's power, His holiness, and His mercy. Because of the victory that her Son would win, she trusted that God's promises would come true.

➔ Mary knew that this kind of work was nothing new for God. He had been working to bring His Messiah to His people just as He promised, “to Abraham and his offspring” (Rom. 4:13).

✘ Abraham waited in faith for that promise to come true. And so Mary waited in faith. Now that He has come, can you wait in faith for the Lord's final coming? Elijah found God in the still soft voice. Mary found Him in the humble manger. Will you find Him in your baptism and in His Word?

➔ In a few minutes you will be able to find God in His Son's body and blood given for the forgiveness of your sins.

✘ You know, I was there in the fields when the shepherds heard the announcement of the Savior's birth. It's on that night that the promises I conveyed to Mary were proclaimed for the entire world. Those shepherds believed the promises along with Mary.

➔ They were so completely changed that those shepherds spread the news of God's great gift to everyone they saw and knew! Can you believe these gifts from God? With His gift of faith in your baptism and through His Spirit, you absolutely can! Now, you are all ready for Christmas. Amen.