

Luke 1:26-38

Maury Povich would have a tough time with this one. He could bring man after man out on stage and he simply would not be able to say, "You are the father!" He would, of course, try with Joseph, but he is not the father of Mary's child. Yes, they are engaged. But to this point that is the extent of their union. Now he might try with this David fellow. Gabriel had told Mary that her child would be given the throne of her father David. Case solved! But he would have no luck in finding the man. David had lived one thousand years before. In the case of Mary's child, no man on earth could have the words, "You are the father!" applied to him. The only way these words could be spoken is to get down on one's knees and in humble faith declare to God what He declared through His angel, "You, O God, You are the Father of Mary's child."

This conception and birth is a once-in-history event. And it is also a conception and birth that is once-for-all. The words Gabriel speaks to Mary are the fulfillment of God's words to David one thousand years earlier. "I want to build a house for God," David told Nathan. "The Lord is with you," said Nathan, "go and do what is in your heart." Sounds reasonable. David lived in a king's palace, but God lived in a tent. Something was wrong with this picture. Something was out of place. God deserved to live in a permanent structure; in a glorious, royal house, second to none. So David's intention was good. He wanted to build God a house. But God said, "No. No you will not build a house for Me. Instead, I will build a house for you. And your house shall be made sure forever."

David's palace would crumble over the years until it eventually would be destroyed altogether. That's what happens to houses that men build. But when God builds a house, it stands forever. This is why no man had relations with Mary. For any child conceived and born in the natural way is like a house built by a man. It stands for a while, but not forever.

All of us are living proof, as is our cemetery out there. When men build a house, it looks nice for a time. It functions well for a time. But sooner or later repairs are needed. But even the best repairs cannot keep the house alive forever. Eventually it dies with a crash or with a whimper and is buried in the ground.

Each one of us...each one of our houses, will one day be uninhabited. Our houses will be buried in the cemetery, but no one will be home. These will be but empty shells which over time will crumble into dust.

And had a mere man built the house that was born of Mary, that would be the end of the story for you and for me. Even were we to build God a house, that would not suffice; that would not help us. Whatever we build with our hands does not last. Nothing we do or build for God can survive forever. Unless God builds a house for us, we are without hope.

But He does. He does, my friends, He builds a house for you. He promised this house to David. He built it within Mary. The house that stands sure forever is Jesus, the Son of the Most High God. And this is your house. For when you were baptized, you were brought into Christ Jesus. He is your house, your dwelling place. Whether you live in a mansion or in a shack, in a cage or an RV, you have a home in Jesus. You are in Christ and He is in you. And your place in Him and with Him is forever.

Did you catch the parallel phrase spoken both to David in our first reading and also to Mary in our Gospel text? Nathan said to David, "*The Lord is with you.*" These same words Gabriel spoke to Mary, "*The Lord is with you.*" And He was. He was with David and with Mary. The Lord was with David according to His promise. He was with Mary according to the flesh. As Gabriel spoke to Mary the Holy Spirit came upon her and overshadowed her, and Jesus was conceived within her womb. The Son of God took on human flesh within Mary. The Lord who was with David, as promise, was now living in the Virgin Mary.

These words, my friend, are also for you. Three times in our Divine Service this morning you are given the words, "*The Lord be with you.*" But this is no wish for the future. This is present reality. The same Lord

promised to David, who took on flesh within Mary, is with you in every sense of the word. He is not a glimmer of hope in your eye. He is not a feeling of joy in your heart. The Son of God, and also Mary's son, is right now with you in spirit and also in flesh and blood. For as your home is in Him, His home is in you. Jesus is not far away in heaven. Heaven is here with you, for Christ is here in Word and in Sacrament. And in you He lives. "The Lord is with you."

"How can this be?" Mary asked the angel. "With God," said Gabriel, "nothing is impossible." This is why you come forward to the altar to receive, not mere bread and wine, but Jesus Christ, the Son of the Most High God, in His very flesh and blood for you. This is your home. Wherever you come from, however this past week has treated you, your home is here in the Sacrament. Here is Christ, the house God built for you.

And receiving Him, your house will stand forever. Yes, your human house will die. It will be buried in the ground and become dust. But your house will be raised again in glory. As sure as Jesus is with you now, so will you be with Him forever.

Now here is an interesting thing. Is today Advent or is today Christmas? December 24 is Christmas Eve, but the blue of Advent still decks the altar. We are singing Advent hymns. We do not light the white Christ candle on our Advent wreath until tonight.

Our Gospel text may help us solve this mystery. Gabriel comes to Mary with the promise of the Christ Child. Advent. The promises of the coming Savior belong to the season of Advent. Yet, as he speaks the promise, the promise is fulfilled. Christmas.

There is a word in the Greek, "*the child to be born*," five words in English; one word in Greek; a participle. And this participle is in the present tense, not in the future. This means that the child to be born, Jesus, is now conceived in Mary's womb. And so Gabriel appears with the Advent promise, yet before he departs from Mary the Word becomes flesh within her.

And so today is both Advent and Christmas. For where the promise of God is given, there also is the fulfillment of the promise. This morning we sing, "*Savior of the Nations, Come*." And we come up to the Sacrament where, in fulfillment, He truly comes to us in the flesh. This morning we hear of God's angel coming to Mary. Tonight we hear the angels singing for joy as the shepherds are told that the promise is fulfilled in Bethlehem.

This fulfillment is for you now. And we need it now. For right now in our life we struggle. Right now we have pain and sadness. Right now we mourn the truth that we have offended our God; the same loving God who has built a house for us.

Today Jesus is here in fulfillment of God's promise of grace. Today He is here in your struggles. Today He knows your pain and sadness. And today He speaks and you are forgiven. There is no one here who does not have a Savior in Jesus. He was conceived and born for you all. He endured the agony and pain of the cross for you all. He died and rose again for you all. And He is the house that God has built for you all.

And so this morning, following the service, we lift the blue from the altar and we deck it with white. Tonight we shall see all candles burning on our wreath. This morning is the joy-filled Advent of promise, for when we return to God's house it will be Christmas. Amen.