



Sunday December 20, 2020  
Luke 1: 26-38 (4th Sunday in Advent)

Pastor Christian Marien

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Every year, as our Advent journey arrives on this fourth Sunday, I am caught by the expectation and anticipation of new life. Yes, of course for the coming birth of Jesus – Mary is as uncomfortable as can be by this time in her pregnancy and the journey to Bethlehem on the back of a donkey is doing very little to ease her discomfort. But before we get too far down the road to Bethlehem, I would tell you of the stories of other Advents. In 2005, my wife and I were preparing for the birth of our first child – a son – though we did not know it at the time. Monthly doctor visits turned into weekly doctor visits and when my wife’s blood pressure began to rise and her feet began to swell – weekly visits to the doctor became daily visits and finally at one visit the doctor told us that it was time. Fearing for the continued safety of mother and child – it was time to welcome this child into the world. We left the doctor’s office stunned and excited and afraid and sat in a coffee shop – because where else would I go – and as my wife drank decaf, I pounded down the espresso praying for some liquid courage. For all of our planning, preparing, and waiting – it was time. We went home to share the news with my in-laws who had traveled to join us in the delivery room and the next morning we arrived at the hospital at 6am to bring this baby into the world.

No one told me that babies did not come on time. I mean I knew there would be some waiting around – but things did not get exciting until hour 21 – it would be almost 3am before this baby would finally be ready to even think about entering the world. And let me tell you those first 20 hours were tough – I tried to eat but my wife said the smell of any food on my breath made her nauseous and well, ice chips were not cutting it for me. I was bored. I watched a movie. I read a book. I tried to coach my wife, but she was not interested – independent as she has always been – she closed her eyes and practiced her breathing on her own. And my wife’s dad – he came and went from the delivery room. And every time he left, he went to the vending machine and bought a Snicker’s bar. And then he would bring it back and leave it in the delivery room. Well, after not eating for almost 19 hours – I ripped open one of those snicker bars and took a bite – to which my wife immediately yelled from across the room – are you eating something with peanuts? And then she made me throw out the rest. I know you are now having sympathy for me – but really you should sympathize with my wife – because when active labor kicked in – I was super excited and impressed with my wife and well, honestly a little scared of her at the same time. And when our son entered into the world – I was a mess – I mean seeing this child be born – meeting your son for the first time – holding him – weeping everywhere – and then watching my father-in-law see the face of his grandson for the first time.

I wonder if Joseph had time on the journey to Bethlehem to ponder what was about to happen. Was he too busy watching the road for bandits, keeping Mary as comfortable as possible, or was he simply overwhelmed from the visit of an angel to tending his pregnant soon-to-be wife and trying to comprehend what all of that meant when he put it all together in his head?

And then there is Mary – even in her discomfort were the words of her song of praise to God still ringing in her ears...

*“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from*

*generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”*

If God ignites the spark of revolution into the world – to bring about a new heaven and a new earth according to God’s plan, Mary is the one who fans the flames. Fear, strength, scattering the proud, bringing down the powerful, lifting up the lowly, filling the hungry with good things and sending the rich away empty. I wonder if Mary had any idea as to God’s great plan for her own life let alone for the life of her son – about to enter the world. And when she met her baby boy for the first time and saw him face-to-face, how did the words she sang in praise of her God shape the love in her heart for the tiny baby she lovingly laid in a manger?

With the birth of Jesus, God promised the world new life. Perhaps every baby’s face is the promise of new life offered again and again to the world.

For Mary and Joseph – the journey was only beginning.

For my wife and myself, the journey was only beginning.

For each and every one of us, the journey of life with God begins again and again with every baby born; with every Advent story that carries us into Christmas; with every graveside that speaks the word of new life and resurrection joy even as we might struggle in the journey.

We are almost there my friends. A baby will be born once again into the manger of our hearts if there is room enough – where each of us will have the chance to kneel down, and lean over the side of the manger and greet the face of God, once again, for the first time.

Thanks be to God. Amen.