



Fourth Sunday in Advent Sunday, December 20th, 2020

The Enchantment of the Annunciation



The Annunciation, He Qi

Welcome to worship this morning. Today we come to the culmination of the Season of Advent, as we celebrate the Annunciation, where Gabriel appears to Mary to advise her of the impending events of Jesus' conception and birth. In place of today's psalm, we also hear the stories of Elizabeth's visit to Mary (The Visitation) and Mary's subsequent insights about the child to whom she will soon give birth (The Magnificat). The events serve as accounts – to use the expression of Max Weber, one of the earliest sociologists of Western thought – that “enchant the world”. This morning and on Christmas morning we shall think about the stories of Christmas through this lens of “enchantment”

OUR GATHERING

Announcements

We Prepare: Bless the Lord my Soul (Taizé)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3y_2ZStGV58&list=RD7IfiXLmYzhQ&index=2

Invitation

In the name of God, the One who creates,
In the name of the Son, Jesus, whom we await as a child
In the name of the Spirit, God in us and among us.

The Lord be with you

And also with you

We are here

in the name of Jesus Christ;

Come among us Jesus!

Come Jesus and meet us here!

We light the Paschal Candle and then all Advent Candles including today's, the Candle of Love

Reader One: Because too many people are wandering in the wilderness, because too many people are sitting in the valley of the shadow of death, we light candles...

Reader Two: Because people all over the world are suffering and we are too busy to notice, we light candles...

Reader One: Today we stop everything and light these candles: one for hope, one for peace, one for joy, and one for love...

Reader Two: May the light from these candles overwhelm the world...

Reader One: May the light from these candles illuminate the valley of the shadow of death...

Reader Two: May the light and the fire from these candles burn away everything that prevents God's Love from being born among us...

Hymn: Once in Royal David's City (TiS 312, Irby, Cecil Frances Alexander)

Opening Prayers that Refuse to Surrender the “Enchantment” of the World

One of the main questions for modern people is how do we arrive at truth. It was the German thinker, Gottfried Lessing, who suggested what has been part of the secular spirit ever since: that truth is only ever achieved through reason, through rational processes alone. Lessing argued that there is no particular historical event, that yields truth to us. This is something that Christians would contest, for we believe that the event of Jesus' birth, God's incarnation, is a moment where truth shines, a moment that carries within, reserves of insight about God, the world and human beings, a moment where the enchantment of the world is not surrendered. This is the thrust of the prayer below, “Behold the Moment, based on the Gospel reading of the “Annunciation”

Behold the moment that is not of human making,
 not a product of political manipulation
 nor of the careful calculations of the powerful,
 coming as it does
 to a woman on the margins
 of a society and a world where oppression
 was a fact much like the night:
 implacable,
 unassailable,
 and surely as eternal as the hills.

Behold the moment that is not of human choosing,
 selecting no one who would offer any power
 to shake the rulers
 mighty
 secure upon their thrones.

Behold the moment that is a doorway, a threshold
 upon which history itself has paused its stride,
 poised to take a new unguessed direction,
 sensing,
 like someone whose eyes
 have seen dawn coming on a different horizon,
 sounds of a distant song of joy
 a new day's gleam,
 new life's birth,

a new way,
new world.

Inspired by Andrew King

The Peace

LET'S HEAR THE WORD

Some Anecdotal Thoughts about the Incarnation

The nativity mystery “conceived from the Holy Spirit and born from the Virgin Mary”, means, that God became human, truly human out of his own grace. The miracle of the existence of Jesus, his “climbing down of God” is: Holy Spirit and Virgin Mary! Here is a human being, the Virgin Mary, and as he comes from God, Jesus comes also from this human being. Born of the Virgin Mary, means a human origin for God. Jesus Christ is not only truly God, he is human like every one of us. He is human without limitation.

Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics I/2

People who have come to know the love of God do not deny the darkness, but they choose not to live in it. They claim that the light that shines in the darkness can be trusted more than the darkness itself and that a little bit of light can dispel a lot of darkness. They point each other to flashes of light here and there, and remind each other that they reveal the hidden but real presence of God.

Henri Nouwen

Increasing rationalization and intellectualization...means...that in principle there are no mysterious incalculable intervening forces in our lives, but instead, all things, in theory, can be *mastered* through *calculation*...through quantification. It means the disenchanting of the world.

Max Weber, “Charisma and Disenchantment, The Vocation Lectures”, Munich, 1917

Samuel 7:1-16 (Good News Translation)

Lara Pillai

On the face of it, this reading of a conversation between King David and the prophet Nathan seems innocuous, even polite. Behind it however stands the question of the freedom of God and the freedom of those who claim to follow God. Will the Lord dwell in a moveable structure or a permanent one? Will the Lord be free to move among all his people or will he be tied to one place of David’s choosing among the elite? And who will build whom a house? What David suggests carries with it a whole set of

political and theological assumptions and questions. Already, Yahweh becomes a vehicle for royal power and 'fixed' thought rather than a God of the victim, who travels with his people through time and place, as the earlier Exodus event suggests.

7 King David was settled in his palace, and the LORD kept him safe from all his enemies. ² Then the king said to the prophet Nathan, "Here I am living in a house built of cedar, but God's Covenant Box is kept in a tent!"

³ Nathan answered, "Do whatever you have in mind, because the LORD is with you." ⁴ But that night the LORD said to Nathan, ⁵ "Go and tell my servant David that I say to him, 'You are not the one to build a temple for me to live in. ⁶ From the time I rescued the people of Israel from Egypt until now, I have never lived in a temple; I have travelled around living in a tent. ⁷ In all my traveling with the people of Israel I never asked any of the leaders^[a] that I appointed why they had not built me a temple made of cedar.'

⁸ "So tell my servant David that I, the LORD Almighty, say to him, 'I took you from looking after sheep in the fields and made you the ruler of my people Israel. ⁹ I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have defeated all your enemies as you advanced. I will make you as famous as the greatest leaders in the world. ¹⁰⁻¹¹ I have chosen a place for my people Israel and have settled them there, where they will live without being oppressed any more. Ever since they entered this land, they have been attacked by violent people, but this will not happen again. I promise to keep you safe from all your enemies and to give you descendants. ¹² When you die and are buried with your ancestors, I will make one of your sons king and will keep his kingdom strong. ¹³ He will be the one to build a temple for me, and I will make sure that his dynasty continues forever. ¹⁴ I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him as a father punishes his son. ¹⁵ But I will not withdraw my support from him as I did from Saul, whom I removed so that you could be king. ¹⁶ You will always have descendants, and I will make your kingdom last forever. Your dynasty will never end.'"

Luke 1:39-55 The Visitation and the Magnificat: Elizabeth visits Mary and Mary proclaims the Meaning of Jesus (New International Version)
Shirley Luttrell

This reading can be used in place of the psalm today (Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26) and is most appropriate as part of the enchantment of the Christmas story. Its briefer form includes

only the Magnificat (1:46-55) but it can also embrace the earlier account of Elizabeth's visit to Mary: bot actually sit together quite well and are part of a literary whole.

In this brief passage the stories of Elizabeth and Mary, indirectly of John and Jesus, intersect. The two women take centre stage. Inspired by the Spirit, Elizabeth declares the fruit of Mary's womb blessed. The babe will become the Lord in a world of lords and masters. We are almost there: wait for tomorrow for the new look Caesar, the new look peace. While this short episode looks forward to the life whose significance is celebrated so typically in tales of his nativity, a common way of celebrating the famous in the ancient world, it brings our attention to the women. Elizabeth first declares Mary blessed, before going on to speak of her child. Mary is blessed because she will bear the child and because she has been a willing participant in the divine initiative.

The Magnificat, Mary's song, 1:46-55, gives voice to her blessedness and at the same time reconnects the personal events to the wider vision which will challenge the lordships of this world. Note the connections as we move through the song: personal joy (47), personal call and blessedness (48), personal divine encounter with the holy one (49), divine compassion for all who fear God (50), divine transformation on a wider front, deposing the powers and lifting the fallen (51-55). The context of the story is the vision of change and transformation.

This divine-human story celebrates women and mothers bringing their creativity to the movement for change. There is no marginalising of women's stories here, although this is the exception rather than the rule in the early writings. The pressures would have been enormous to romanticise women's roles into submissive stereotypes or limit their identity to pregnancy, childbirth, and child raising. Maybe this is already operating here, but across two thousand years of tradition let us take what survived the male editors and celebrate what these stories can represent.

Spirituality is not men's business alone. Holiness is the companion of life, of intimacy, of pregnancy, of childbirth, of family. Holiness is at home with the unromantic and painful aspects of all of these. Holiness invites both men and women into sensing divine presence in the first stirrings, the foetal gymnastics, the soiled nappies/diapers, the tired nights, the teething cries, the not knowing what to do. Human business is holy business - and frequently messy business.

³⁹ At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, ⁴⁰ where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴² In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! ⁴³ But why am I so favoured, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"

⁴⁶ And Mary said:

“My soul glorifies the Lord
 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
 48 for he has been mindful
 of the humble state of his servant.
 From now on all generations will call me blessed,
 49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me—
 holy is his name.
 50 His mercy extends to those who fear him,
 from generation to generation.
 51 He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
 he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
 52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones
 but has lifted up the humble.
 53 He has filled the hungry with good things
 but has sent the rich away empty.
 54 He has helped his servant Israel,
 remembering to be merciful
 55 to Abraham and his descendants forever,
 just as he promised our ancestors.”
 56 Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then
 returned home.

The word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Romans 16:25-27 (New International Version)

These last words of Romans are an acclamation of God. They have probably been added to Paul's letter as a fitting climax for its use in the liturgical context of the community of faith. Many ancient manuscripts do not have them or have them earlier. It is interesting that the primary benefit at the receiving end of this great bow of praise that touches humanity and reaches up to God is *strengthening*. One might even use the word, enabling, which has become much loved in recent years.

The purpose of the acclamation is to lift our sights higher than usual. Not only was this the good news from Christ (and about Christ); it was also a mystery (another echo of Colossians and Ephesians). The term “acclamation”, was a favourite in some circles to describe a future event or revelation which came from the heart of God and is pictured as being suspended in divine care until its release, like the release of doves at occasions of great celebration. The theme of inclusiveness of the Gentiles, hitherto outsiders and excluded, is at the heart of this good news. It remains a difficult attitude to sustain, but here it is the heart of the good news, the core of faith, the wisdom and compassion of God.

25 Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with

the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, ²⁶ but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from^[a] faith— ²⁷ to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

Luke 1:26-38: The Annunciation of Gabriel to Mary (Good News Translation)

Shirley Luttrell

As we approach Christmas we think of ‘incarnation’, God present in Jesus. But incarnation involves a lot more than God just being present in one human being. Through that one human life, God becomes embroiled in the whole of human culture, history and society. The fact that God appears in a vulnerable child, suggests that God’s presence among us is from a particular perspective. In contrast to our Hebrew reading above, where God becomes part of an elite linked to David’s royal court and the temple, in this account of the so-called “Annunciation”, Mary represents a particular class of people, the “anawim”, the poor of the land, who wait upon God’s revolutionary action in history. In this reading, we see the reversal of the direction King David took. God in Christ becomes accessible to the ordinary, to the masses, reflecting the spirit of Exodus yet again.

²⁶ In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy God sent the angel Gabriel to a town in Galilee named Nazareth. ²⁷ He had a message for a young woman promised in marriage to a man named Joseph, who was a descendant of King David. Her name was Mary. ²⁸ The angel came to her and said, “Peace be with you! The Lord is with you and has greatly blessed you!”

²⁹ Mary was deeply troubled by the angel's message, and she wondered what his words meant. ³⁰ The angel said to her, “Don't be afraid, Mary; God has been gracious to you. ³¹ You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High God. The Lord God will make him a king, as his ancestor David was, ³³ and he will be the king of the descendants of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end!”

³⁴ Mary said to the angel, “I am a virgin. How, then, can this be?”

³⁵ The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and God's power will rest upon you. For this reason, the holy child will be called the Son of God. ³⁶ Remember your relative Elizabeth. It is said that she cannot have children, but she herself is now six months pregnant, even though she is very old. ³⁷ For there is nothing that God cannot do.”

³⁸ “I am the Lord's servant,” said Mary; “may it happen to me as you have said.” And the angel left her.

The Gospel of the Lord

Praise to you Lord Christ

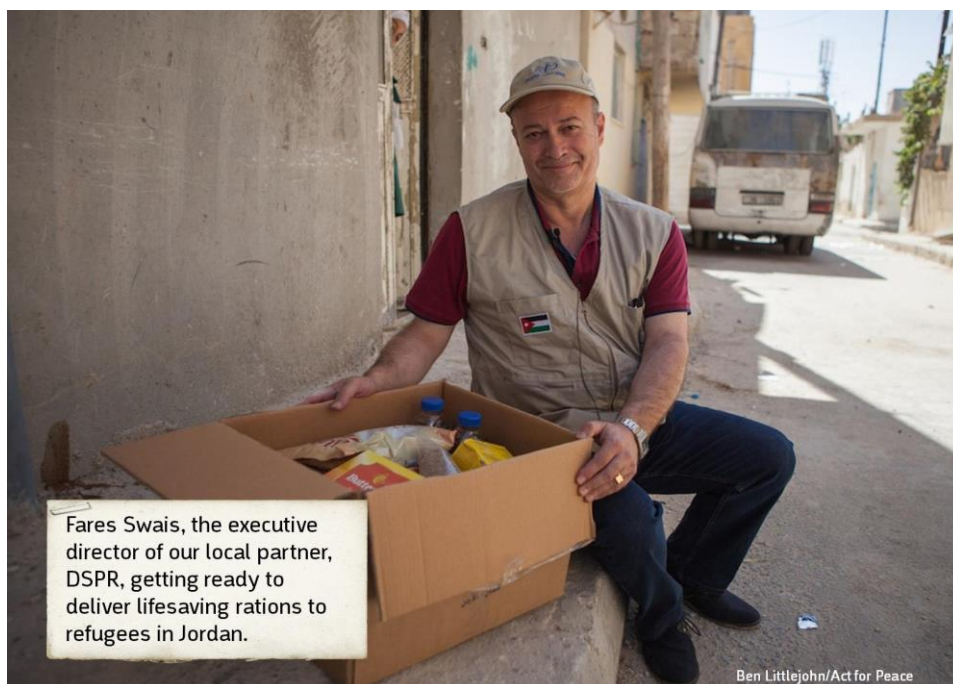
Hymn: Jesus Christ is waiting (TiS 665, Noel Nouvelot, John L. Bell)

Some Thoughts...The Enchantment of the Annunciation

The Christmas Bowl - Let's Give

These last weeks, we have watched videos covering a range of activities of Act for Peace, of the global ecumenical movement. The first week of Advent, the week of hope, you focused on Afghanistan. The second, week, the week of peace, Bangladesh. The third week, the week of joy, Sri Lanka. This week, the fourth week of Advent, the week of love, we focus upon Jordan, still the home of displaced refugees from Syria, still a situation that demands our attention and response. Today we hear the words of Fares Swais, Executive Director of DSPR, Act for Peace's partner in Jordan, as he explains the ongoing plight of many Syrians and the challenge the refugee communities continue to face.

https://www.actforpeace.org.au/www_AFP/media/Christmas-Bowl/CB20-Resources/CB20-05-FourthSundayOfAdvent.mp4



Fares Swais, the executive director of our local partner, DSPR, getting ready to deliver lifesaving rations to refugees in Jordan.

Ben Littlejohn/Act for Peace

Doxology

***Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,
praise him, all creatures here below,
praise him above, ye heavenly host,
praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.***

Prayer of Dedication**Prayers of the People**

John Egarr

After each petition, the leader says "Help us not let go of the enchantment of the Gospel" and the response, "Help us to live with generosity and grace"

Let us say the Lord's Prayer

***Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.***

***Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.***

***For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.***

하늘에 계신 우리 아버지여
이름이 거룩히 여김을 받으시오며
나라이 임하옵시며
뜻이 하늘에서 이룬 것 같이
땅에서도 이루어지이다.
오늘날 우리에게 일용할 양식을 주옵시고

우리가 우리에게
 죄 지은 자를 사하여 준 것 같이
 우리 죄를 사하여 주옵시고
 우리를 시험에 들게 하지 마옵시고
 다만 악에서 구하옵소서
 대개 나라와 권세와 영광이
 아버지께 영원히 있사옵나이다. 아멘

Closing Hymn: O What a Gift (TiS 278, Canticle of Gift, Pat Uhl, arr. Betty Pulkingham)

Blessing and Sending Out

Christ is life!
 Christ is about enchanting the world
 Go in peace to love and serve the Lord

In the name of Christ

**Laudate Dominum (Aksel Rykkvin, Oslo Cathedral,
 Decembertoner, W.A. Mozart, from “Vesperae solemnes de
 confessore” (K. 339)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q9rvyvssvul>

