

ADVENT 4

Luke 1:26-38

NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE WITH GOD!

1. The Highest serves the lowest
2. So that the lowest might serve too.

This week I will share one of my ambitious vicar plans with you. See, I really want to accomplish some fun things here at Apostles, and many times I get some pretty good ideas. For instance, this week, I'm thinking of sending President George W. Bush an invitation to Apostles for Christmas. He would probably like the candlelight Christmas Eve service; afterwards will be a presidential dinner in the fellowship hall – the ladies can whip that up the night before, no problem. Really, it shouldn't be too much trouble to get it set up and organized. I know, it's short notice, but I think the President will want to, and I know the ladies are capable. I'm getting looks of doubt from some of you. Why is that? Shouldn't the President want to be with his public? Ok, this is a crazy idea – a person of such high position doesn't have time to pop in for Christmas with common people like you and me. And a presidential meal takes serious time too – it's an impossible idea. While I'm letting you into the inner workings of my mind, I have to confess something else. I borrowed this idea from another person – I borrowed it from God. You see, nothing is impossible with God. And this morning, through the Annunciation by the angel Gabriel, he tells us that The Highest serves the lowest, and he does it so that the lowest might serve too.

Do you ever wonder why angels start out with, "Don't be afraid?"

While we're talking about highs and lows, we should check out the highs and lows that come along with this announcement by Gabriel. They're important to consider because they affect you and me. Six months before this morning's announcement, God sent Gabriel to give a similar message. He announced the birth of John the Baptist. That announcement came in the golden splendor of the temple – all the smells and bells of temple worship, the clang and clatter of cattle and coins, in the bustle of busy Jerusalem. It came to Zechariah, a priest – a well known, respected person of social position and spiritual authority. From our point of view, that seems a fitting start to

God's salvation plan, doesn't it? A highly important message deserves a highly important place and a highly important person – High all around.

So, I wonder, if Gabriel hadn't been the perfectly obedient messenger, might he have questioned today's Annunciation's location? Zooming north of Jerusalem, over the hills to a little bowl of a valley and a small town nestled on the side of a hill. Narrow streets zigzag along lush terraced gardens and low-roofed white houses. And despite the quaint beauty and the location on the trade route from East to West the truth is – this backwater little town doesn't compare to Jerusalem. It is quite lowly in comparison. And if that weren't bad enough, the message of the birth of the Savior comes to, of all people, a lowly young girl – maybe 13-15 years old. And the possibility that she might better herself by marriage is slim – she's marrying the town carpenter. It doesn't seem to fit the greatest plan of all time, does it? The message of highest importance in a lowly place to a lowly virgin – lowly all around.

When you get beyond those high-low contradictions you have to stand back and marvel at the announcement itself. Do you ever wonder why angels start out with, "Don't be afraid?" I see Gabriel stopping outside the door and reviewing his angel checklist before he goes in: "Ok, first, 'Don't be afraid,' then the message. Ok, here I go." No, no, no. It is the standard angelic greeting for a good reason – there is only glory and power in this messenger, and absolutely no sin, not a bit. Virgin Mary, full of sin, stands there, washing clothes, or making lunch, trembling in fear because, like you and me, she is stained with sin, through and through. Imperfection and

perfection don't mix, like oil and water, darkness and light – we don't compare to this holy messenger or God, his master – and so we tremble in fear.

This is why the message is so important and beautiful and so necessary. “You have found favor with God,” Gabriel says. God answers the problem right away. The angel speaks to Mary, but this message is for you too! It's for you, this favor with God. Remember the definition of grace – undeserved love to the sinner. We – Mary, you, me – need this favor because sinful people can only tremble in fear of perfection and the hell that imperfection deserves. We need this grace or we die. We need Jesus – the Son of the Most High, the Son of God, the Highest King. He fulfills all that God promised – from the line of David, a king who will rule forever in a kingdom David couldn't have begun to imagine. This king will rule all believers, as Paul says, in “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom 14:17).” And Luke, when he writes later in Acts, tells us why this Highest King is so important: “From [David's] descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised...I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you (Acts 13:23, 38).” The Highest serves the lowest – the Savior serves sinners.

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God's love shines through these highs and lows, because nothing is impossible with God. This announcement is the fulfillment of God's promise from the beginning of time. The Savior serves sinners, and we cannot forget how he does that as we joyfully look at the beautiful little baby in the box of hay. The Highest is born of a sinful virgin, lives and walks and talks among sinful people, and dies in the lowest, most horrible way possible. That is the purpose of the Christmas baby- Savior we love to sing to and worship – he pays the punishment of sin. The Highest Savior serves the lowest sinners with his own

life. This is God's grace running on all cylinders. This is the beginning of the destruction of sin's deadly power. And it gives you and me never-ending life by removing that stain of sin permanently.

This announcement is one of the greatest events in salvation history. It's the fulfillment of God's promise. It shows that nothing is impossible with God. And the service that we see in the Highest, the Son of God, motivates the lowest sinners. Nothing is impossible with God, not even motivating so that the lowest might serve too.

Remember Mary standing there kneading dough or doing laundry? Gabriel enters – an angel of God – and Mary, sinner, trembles in fear. Think of how overwhelming that must have been, the awe at a perfect being! And again, Mary is one of the lowest in her society, a virgin girl, and a sinner too. The lowly was chosen to bear what was holy. A virgin would be the mother of God. But, you know, as glorious as that is, it's not all wonder and joy. Think of the situation. Mary's going to be pregnant, a situation we welcome with joy, unless of course we're not supposed to be pregnant – like if we aren't married yet. These are wonderful and difficult things to experience. God's Son, Mary's son, not her husband's son; Wonderful joy, with social disgrace; A baby's new life, next to a mother stoned for adultery; a child to love and pour her life into, only to watch him give his life for sinners.

Under that load, Mary is a good example for us, because of her reaction. Had I been there, I might have doubted. Like Zechariah, “How can I be sure what you say is really going to happen?” Unlike Zechariah, Mary asks because she doesn't understand and wants to know. “I'm a virgin, I'm not married, I don't live with Joseph.” But as Gabriel relates to her God's plan to bring his Savior to the world through her, Mary's response shows complete trust, “Behold, I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me just as you have said.” She accepts God's will completely – let everything God wants come true, when and how he wants it.

Our reaction to God's love and plans is often very unlike Mary's isn't it? Many times our lives say everything but, "Behold, I am the Lord's servant." We can forget that our entire life is service to God. That means being a father to your children or a loving wife is service to God. It means that caring for friends and neighbors, washing the dishes, preparing dinner, is service to God. It's all service to God. Remembering to keep Christ in mind as we prepare for Christmas – that's service to God, too. That forgetfulness or laziness in these situations is sin. So is saying by our attitude, "No, Lord, I cannot do anything else besides being in church. That's a little too much of my time. Just give me what you've got on Sunday, that's all I need."

***What a blessing
to be a servant
like Mary!***

Forgetfulness, laziness, not caring – this disservice, like any other sin, can put us outside of the King's kingdom. In the face of the love God shows again and again, this sin is mistrust and lack of respect. God, of course, knew we would be unloving and inconsistent servants. That's the reason the Savior is announced. It's the reason his mother Mary would have to watch her son die – he pays for our forgetfulness, our inconsistency, and lack of love. He is the Son of God. That means that he always remembers, is always consistent, and always loves – he's the perfect servant in our place. He loved us in this way to win a heavenly eternal home for us.

He loved us, so that you and I, the lowest, might serve too. We can live a life of service just like Mary, motivated by the love of the Highest. Serve with your life – share the message of a Savior from sin, take joy at hearing his Word, in worshiping with others, take joy in everyday life, in children, in friends, in sickness, in dishes and laundry, in work – because it's all service to God. And be joyful, too, that the Most High chose you, the lowly, to be his servants – sinners who can now wear his righteousness and serve simply by living. See, Nothing is Impossible with God. The Highest Savior serves the lowest sinners, so that you and I, the lowest, might serve him too. What a blessing to hear the announcement of salvation! What a blessing to be a servant like Mary! Let's announce those blessings in our lives of service! Amen.

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