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Zion Lutheran Church, Youngstown, Ohio

Weekend of Sunday, December 24, 2017
4th Sunday of Advent/Lectionary X/Proper X/Year B
Primary Text: Luke 1:26-38
Sermon Title: “Love Has Come!”

Theme

In this annunciation, Luke makes clear that God comes with good news for ordinary people (Mary) from little known places (Nazareth). This king will not be born to royalty in a palace, but to common folk in a stall. Here Luke highlights the role of the Spirit, a special emphasis in his gospel.

Text

²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.” ²⁹But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³²He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” ³⁴Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” ³⁵The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. ³⁶And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God.” ³⁸Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

Sermon

I could begin by stating the obvious, the long season of Advent is coming to an end. This morning is the fourth Sunday of Advent. The next time we gather it will be Christmas Eve. But then this year is that once in blue moon event when the fourth Sunday of Advent is also Christmas Eve. We can never have a shorter Advent season than this one!

And since in today's Gospel Reading we have the Annunciation, the announcement of God's plan to use Mary as the mother of the savior of the world, and then beginning at 5:00 PM we will have the story of the Nativity, what we have today is the shortest pregnancy on record – just seven hours! And all the mothers in the audience whispered under their breath, "If only it were that easy."

Well, of course I am speaking of the liturgical calendar, not a real solar calendar. I don't know for sure, but my guess is that Jesus went full term just like most human babies.

Joseph, no doubt had plans like any man. He wanted a wife. We could talk about the tradition in the Middle East to arrange marriages, but as an old acquaintance, Dr. Arijet De once told me about his own arranged marriage, his parents loved him more than anyone else, and so who could he trust more to find him the best wife, a choice not sullied by his own mere physical attraction. And that is not to say that Mary was not attractive. She probably was, after all, the angel Gabriel told her that she had found favor with God.

Nazareth was a small town in those days. How well Joseph, her betrothed, and Mary knew each other is uncertain, but they probably knew each other. And knowing they were betrothed, an old fashioned word that meant engaged, they may have been permitted some time together to get to know each other better. It may be my own projection, but I am going to say about them that *Love Has Come*.

I don't know whether God chose Joseph and Mary before they chose each other? I think it is like God to be orchestrating every little detail of our lives. But the text indicates that God chose Mary to be the mother of his Son, because in her God had found favor – whatever that means. And while my Catholic friends might take offense to my line of thinking, I don't think Mary was the one and only one that

God could have selected for this high calling. Do you think for a moment that God could not have worked out his plan to save the world with someone else? Let us remember that this story, as are all stories in scripture, is about God, and so I would like to make the point that God's *Love Has Come* in this passage. God's love not just for Mary and Joseph, but God's love for all of creation through Mary and Joseph.

There are others in this story, other unnamed participants. You and me for example! Oh I know, your names nor mine are mentioned, but we are there by implication. You see “¹⁶For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

You see *Love Has Come*. God looked at the plight of his creation and saw that we were never going to make it on our own, and that just wouldn't do, and so out of great love, God came down in the form of the Son, and took the weight of the world's sin upon himself. But now I am getting ahead of myself aren't I? The point is, in this passage for this Fourth Sunday of Advent, mere hours before our celebration of Christmas Eve begins, we celebrate that *Love Has Come*.

In just a few hours, those of you who will come back will hear the rest of the story, the story of the greatest love the world has ever known.

I know it's weird to come to church in the morning and in the evening on the same day. If I had to make a choice, I'd probably choose tonight rather than this morning, but we didn't make a choice did we? No, we came because we want to hear a precious story of love come down. I hope you are blessed by it.

Let us sing about praises to God about it with this hymn titled, “Love Has Come.”