

## **Advent 4 B 2020**

Dove of Peace Lutheran Church

Pastor Stephen Springer

December 20, 2020

Luke 1:26-38

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

Dear Friends:

I was not born in Minnesota. Nor have I ever visited Minnesota. Minnesotans feel pity for me, and consider me to be “culturally deprived.” Because I am unable to fully grasp the monumental contributions that have been made by tater tot hot dish, by Target, and by Jesse Ventura. However, I do grasp the significance of Sven and Ole stories Because where I come from, we have Boudreaux and Thibodeaux stories. And I would like to share one with you this morning.

God decided to reward the people of Louisiana for their faith. They call their counties “parishes.” Many of their parishes are named for saints and Christian holy days. And the people of Louisiana have such hard lives. They are so very, very far from heaven. And so very, very close to Texas. And so God, in his mercy, decided that the New Orleans Saints would win the superbowl that year. And so God summoned his most trusted messenger, the archangel Gabriel, and commissioned him to go to Louisiana and to proclaim the Lord’s favor for the people of Louisiana.

And it came to pass, in those days, that Gabriel descended from the throne of God, level by level, until he reached a fishing camp in the heart of the Atchafalaya. And descending into the cypress swamp, in the middle of the night, in a huge sphere of blinding light, Gabriel banged on the door of the little shack. Every alligator within a one-mile radius was terrified and jumped into the water for safety.

Boudreaux and Thibodeaux emerged from the little shack, still wearing their boxer shorts and T-shirts and rubbing their sleepy eyes. “I am Gabriel,” the angel roared. “And I bring you tidings of joy for all the people of Louisiana.” Boudreaux and Thibodeaux were quiet for a moment. And for another moment.

And then Thibodeaux spoke up. “Who did you say you are? Pay the bill?”

“Not ‘pay the bill,’ you moron. Gabriel.”

“Who?” Boudreaux demanded. “Do we know you? Who’s your Momma?”

“I have no Momma” the angel thundered. “I am Gabriel, and I bring you tidings.”

But Boudreaux and Thibodeaux were perplexed, and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. “Moray eel? Is that who you said you are?” Thibodeaux asked. Sigh. “Gabriel.” “Ring my bell?” Boudreaux asked.

“GAY-BREE-EL,” the angel thundered. “Gay-bree-el, Gay-bree-el, Gay-bree-el.” In the distance, a cypress tree tumbled down into the water. More alligators leapt into the water. Then there was absolute silence.

Finally, Boudreaux spoke up: “I am BOO-droe. BOO-droe.” And this is TIBBA-doe. TIBBA-doe. *Bienvenue en Louisiane.* Welcome to Louisiana, Mister GAY-BREE-EL.”

And from that night onward, and forevermore, the people of Louisiana celebrate that event as The Feast of the Enunciation. The time when Gabriel brought tidings of the Saints triumphant. The football team, that is. It gets worse.

The Christian feast of the Annunciation is on March 25. Nine months before Christmas. And the birth of John the Baptist is June 24, six months before Christmas. As the angel said in today’s gospel reading, *And 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.* John’s mother was miraculously pregnant six months before Jesus’ mother became miraculously pregnant. And so the church reasons that these dates are logical: March 25 for the Annunciation. June 24 for the Nativity of John the Baptist. All based on the assumption that Jesus was born on December 25. There’s no factual or historical reason to believe that December 25 was the day. It’s an assumption. A big assumption. And so, the feast of the Assumption is also celebrated by the Catholic church on August 15. (Okay, now we’ve hit bottom.)

In addition to March 25, the church recalls the annunciation on the fourth and final Sunday of Advent. Just before Christmas. Actually, the fourth Sunday of Advent is about annunciations, plural, because in Year A, last year, we read and hear the story of the annunciation to Joseph. The season of Advent, which until now has been dominated by prophets and apocalypse, by watching and waiting, by John the Baptist and the wilderness— a new image, a new icon, now comes into view. Pregnancy.

Pregnancy is sort of a universal experience. Each of us is the product of a pregnancy. And a number of us have actually been pregnant. And as common as it is, as universal as it is, it is still mysterious and holy. The changes in the mother’s body, in her hormones, affect her and everyone around her. And no matter how dire the circumstances, no matter how unplanned the pregnancy, pregnancy always has elements of blessing and joy and hope. And no matter how perfect the circumstances are, no matter how privileged and protected the mother may be, there is always danger of physical harm and even death. Particularly in the era of the Bible and in the centuries of Christianity between then and now.

One phrase that describes pregnancy is *heroic fragility*. The mother is at once a hero— having almost superhuman powers— and is also spectacularly fragile. Our gospel reading today ends with the angel departing. But the very next verse says, “*In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country.*” A pregnant woman traveling alone in those days. An unwed pregnant woman traveling into the hills. With haste. We have to marvel at Mary’s tenacity, her heroic fragility.

Mary’s pregnancy is more than just a necessary biological step, a plot development in the story, on the road to Christmas and Bethlehem. Pregnancy and all that it implies is intrinsic to Advent. And Advent is not just a prelude to December 25. But a spiritual season to practice hope, to practice living in the not-yet, the things-are-not-complete zone. This is a spiritual skill that we practice for its own sake. Not just something to fill up on the time before Christmas. Christmas is, and always will be. Easter is, and always will be. But if that’s true, Advent also is, and also always will be. It is always the season to prepare a way. It is always the season to watch and wait. It is always the season for heroic fragility, to be vigilant about danger and to be vigilant about hope. It is always the season for those things. Carry Advent with you wherever you go, in all the seasons of the year, and in all the seasons of life. Amen.