

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

December 19, 1993

2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8b-11, 16

Now when David, the king, was settled in his house, and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him, the king said to the prophet Nathan, "See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent." Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that you have in mind; for the Lord is with you." But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan: Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the Lord: Are you the one to build me a house to live in?

Thus says the Lord of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.

Romans 16:25-27

To God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever! Amen.

Luke 1:26-38

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed with his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He 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. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The 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. 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. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here I am, the servant of the Lord; Let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What happens when a prophecy is fulfilled somewhat differently than you anticipated?
2. Today's readings speak of God residing in a tent, a house, and a womb. Where does God dwell?
3. How might the choosing of Mary to be the Mother of God, as described in the Annunciation, be different from what King David envisioned in Second Samuel?
4. What does Mary's acceptance of her role in life say to today's woman -- or man?

Marilyn Matti ☐

How does God meet humanity?

THE GOOD NEWS

GOD'S WORD-IN
EVERYDAY LIVING

By Father Paul Turner



FINALLY, on the fourth Sunday, Advent shifts to more familiar ground. We hear Luke's breathtaking story of the annunciation. A young woman, likely of Asian and African descent, sees a vision of an angel and hears an incredible message. God is asking her permission to use her for the fulfillment of the divine plan. She retains the presence of mind to ask a few questions, but then agrees to the request. Just as simply, the angel disappears.

The story sets the scene for the birth of Jesus which we celebrate later in the week. It's taken Advent a while to get down to this point. The season has darted from the end of the world through the ministry of John the Baptist, and now halts at the events leading up to the birth of Christ. You might say it's beginning to sound a lot like Christmas.

If you think of Advent's Gospels as a funnel, you can better imagine where we are. Advent starts with the biggest theme, warnings about the second coming of Christ. Then it turns to events during Jesus' life. The season ends with the prediction of Jesus' birth. Historically, the Gospels go backward in time.

Angels have enjoyed a rebirth in popular culture these days. They're appearing in decorations, music and Broadway plays. In a way, this is the mother of all angel stories, in which one appears to announce God's plan for heaven and earth.

IF YOU COMPARE, this story with the one announcing the birth of John the Baptist (Lk 1:5-25) you'll see some parallels. Both relate unlikely pregnancies, one of an old woman, the other of an unmarried woman. Both are introduced by an angel. Both have characters asking how this is possible. Luke uses this device to prepare us for the role John the Baptist plays throughout the life of Jesus: the one who foreshadows what happens to Christ.

The term "Messiah," we saw in last week's column, first comes from a prophecy in the book of Daniel (9:24-27). Daniel learned that an appointed prince (the Messiah) would restore Jerusalem. If we revisit that reading in the light of Luke's annun-

ciation story, we see something amazing. The one who revealed the message to Daniel was Gabriel, the same name as the angel who appears to Mary. Gabriel predicts to Daniel that the Messiah will come during a period of 70 weeks.

OK, boys and girls, get out your calculators. Seventy weeks equals how many days? John was conceived six months (180 days) before Jesus, who then is carried nine months by Mary (270). Forty days after he's born he'll be brought to the temple. Get it? Luke plays with numbers to convey his message: Jesus is the Messiah.

The other theme which Luke draws out is that Mary remained a virgin through the conception of Jesus. For Luke this miracle supports our belief that Jesus is the Son of God. The virginal conception is strictly affirmed in only two places in the Bible, here and in Matthew's version of the same story. No other stories of Jesus' life and death, no epistles make this point. In fact, when Paul writes to the Romans around 50 A.D. he says that Jesus was declared to be Son of God by his resurrection from the dead (Rom 1:4). Luke, writing a few decades later, includes the tradition which must have gained universal acclaim after Paul, that Jesus is Son of God by his conception.

Students of comparative religions rightly point out that Christianity is not the only religion which claims a miraculous birth from one divine and one human parent. Many pagan religions claim to have a god conceived in the same way. What is unique in Christianity is that we believe the divine parent has no specific gender. It is the gender-neutral Spirit which impregnates Mary. The virginal conception in the Christian tradition reveals a God more awesome, more powerful, and more mysterious than any known human or natural force. Further, the same Spirit which brings about his birth will raise Jesus from the dead.

THIS SUNDAY'S Gospel raises up one of the largest issues we face as believers -- the meeting of God and humanity. How does God talk to us? How does God reveal the divine plan? How do we discern the will of God?

Interpretations of this Gospel range from the fundamental to the skeptical. Some believe it happened exactly this way: an angel appears to Mary, a virgin, who miraculously conceived the Son of God. Others find it too fanciful; they challenge the historicity of this passage because it sounds like too many other religions, and because the Bible itself doesn't back up the virgin birth when it has plenty of opportunities to do so.

Father Paul Turner is pastor of St. John Francis Regis Parish, Kansas City. ☐

Daily Scripture Readings

Third Sunday In Advent

December 12, 1993

Isaiah 61:1-2, 10-11

(Ps) Luke 1:46-50, 53-54

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

John 1:6-8, 19-28

Monday, December 13

Numbers 24:2-7, 15-17

Psalms 25:4-9

Matthew 21:23-27

Tuesday, December 14

Zephaniah 3:1-2, 9-13

Psalms 34:2-3, 6-7,

17-19, 23

Matthew 21:28-32

Wednesday, December 15

Isaiah 45:6-8, 18, 21-25

Psalms 85:9-14

Luke 7:18-23

Thursday, December 16

Isaiah 54:1-10

Psalms 30:2, 4-6, 11-13

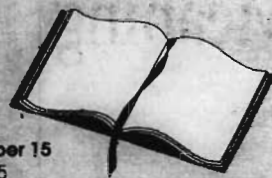
Luke 7:24-30

Friday, December 17

Genesis 49:2, 8-10

Psalms 72:3-4, 7-8, 17

Matthew 1:1-17



Saturday, December 18

Jeremiah 23:5-8

Psalms 72:1, 12-13, 18-19

Matthew 1:18-24

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Sunday, December 19

2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8b-11, 16

Psalms 89:2-5, 27-29

Romans 16:25-27

Luke 1:26-38