

GRACE, MERCY, AND PEACE FROM GOD OUR HEAVENLY FATHER AND FROM OUR LORD AND SAVIOR, JESUS CHRIST.

The text is Luke the first chapter beginning at the twenty-sixth verse.

*In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name 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 father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."*

*And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"*

*And the angel answered 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 called holy—the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.*

Have you ever tried to imagine what it was like in Eden—to walk with God in the cool of the day. It must have been so sweet. It is of course what God had in mind all along. In the book of revelation we read ***“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.””***

It’s like bookends—what we were created for and what we are destined for. It’s just this mess in between...

Adam made what many of our contemporaries might call a bad choice. Well, it was a bad choice, one bad enough to have a special name. We call it sin. It would’ve been bad enough if it were only him, but it wasn’t. Sin is like a plague, a congenital one. You were born with it. I was born with it. And it’s fatal.

And there was nothing anyone could do about it.

God had chosen a people, the descendants of Abraham. He had given them His Law. He had given them a land of their own, a land of milk and honey. And God gave them lots of chances to follow the Law He had given, to get it right. He was abundantly merciful to them, but they kept turning back to the behavior of their father Adam.

And we can understand that turning back to the behavior of Adam, because we have all done it. How often have we failed to love our neighbor and then tried to figure out how to hide our ‘bad choice’ from God, or maybe we just tried to convince God (or maybe it was just ourselves) that what we did wasn’t that bad, except it was. It was bad enough that we deserve death.

We can't hide anything from God and there's nothing we can do to please him. ***"None is righteous, no, not one"***. Not in God's eyes.

There was nothing anyone could do about it. Not until one quiet day in Nazareth when an angel appeared to a young woman named Mary and said, ***"Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!"***

You see ***God loved the world so*** much ***that He gave His only Son*** to solve the problem of our sin. Did you notice the verb? He GAVE is only Son. He didn't say "send", He said GAVE. And first He gave Him to a young virgin, who's only qualification was faith. She was told something unbelievable by an unimaginable being the like of which she had never seen or imagined. Her response was a simple one, ***"Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."***

Since that fateful day in the garden of Eden, God had been with His people at a distance. At times with only in His interactions with a man for example Abraham or Joseph, then when the time was right, with a whole people. He led His children on their Exodus out of Egypt with mighty deeds, deeds that they were to tell their children. During that trip he formalized his presence with them in the tent of the tabernacle and finally in the temple in Jerusalem.

But here something different was happening. God was taking on the form of a man. God was no longer at a distance. He had become one of us.

For nine months God's presence with his people was in the womb of a virgin. Mary received God's presence in her by faith. I suppose you could call her the very first Christian, for it is the same thing with us. We hear God's Word and faith takes root in us.

Roman Catholics hold the Mary was born without original sin—that she would have to have been pure already to receive Jesus in her body. Can you see the flaw in that? If that were true for her, it would have to be true for all of us as well, and we both know that we all ***have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*** But we also have the sure word that it is ***Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.***

By that faith we understand our own weakness and tendency toward sin. By that faith we also understand that the Father loves us far beyond our comprehension. By that faith we know that our sins are forgiven, not by anything that we have done, but by the work Jesus did on the Cross. In His death our sins are forgiven. In His resurrection we have a new life hidden in Him.

Amen

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NOW MAY THE PEACE OF GOD WHICH PASSES ALL UNDERSTANDING,  
KEEP YOUR HEARTS AND MINDS THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST JESUS IN TO  
LIFE EVERLASTING.

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