

"The Annunciation"

Luke 1:(1-25) 26-38

December 3, 2003

Midweek - Advent 1

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

Boise, Idaho

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Flesh and blood. It's fascinating, really, this stuff that your body's made of. Skin covers up muscle that's attached by tendons to bone. The bone supports the frame and protects the organs that keep you going. Blood takes oxygen from breath and pumps it to every single living cell in your body. Fascinating and miraculous. You're not some blob of primordial ooze that accidentally developed into a higher life form. You're fearfully and wonderfully made.

Flesh and blood: Fascinating and miraculous, but both have their problems. Scratchy throats and stuffy noses. Painful joints, fever, pulled muscles, stretched tendons and broken bones. Skinned knees and skin disorders. Genetic mutations and auto-immune disorders. Heart trouble, adverse reactions to medication, cancer, diabetes and anemia. The list goes on and on.

It's not just a physical, medical issue-it's a doctrinal one. The wages of sin is death, and these pains are just precursors. Sin isn't content to poison the soul: It corrupts your flesh and blood as well, trying to number your days. That's why you get sick, hurt, injured; and that's why you eventually face physical death. Some of this is direct cause and effect: If I break the speed limit, lose control and drive my car into a tree, it's pretty clear that my injuries are a result of my sin. Sometimes, you're sick or injured just because you live in a dangerous, dying, germy world.

In a way, these pains and sufferings you experience are a blessing, because each one reminds you of your need for rescue and redemption. Each one physically teaches you the wages of sin and reminds you of your need for the Savior. What would you and I do if sin destroyed our souls and let our bodies be until we dropped dead? We'd worry not at all about sin, and we'd remain unforgiven; but those pains keep reminding us of our need.

All of this is particularly disturbing when the pain belongs to a defenseless child. It's a gut-wrenching thing to see a child who is suffering, and time and time again you'll hear parents say, "I'd do anything to take his place. I'd rather suffer than let him suffer."

This is exactly what God says about you. That's what you heard in the Scripture reading before.

The angel Gabriel comes into this dark, sin- and pain-full world to deliver a message to young Mary: "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" He goes on to say to the troubled girl, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS."

You know what's going on here: Jesus is becoming flesh. When Gabriel says, "The Lord is with you," it's a statement about flesh and blood. It's not, "The Lord is so all-present in His glorious spiritual nature that He's here with you like He's everywhere." No, the almighty Son of God is with

Mary because He is now a tiny cell or two inside of her womb. Jesus is taking on flesh and blood. When He's born, He'll have fingers and toes just like you. If He falls and skins his knee, He'll need a Band-Aid, too, just like you.

He's flesh and blood, just like you.

Why is He just like you? Because His name is Jesus, "Savior." He's just like you because He's come to save you. And how will He save you? By taking your place. This is what the Incarnation is about: The Lord looks down upon sinful man and, in effect, says, "I would do anything to take his place and suffer for him, and so I will. I'll take his place. I'll become man and endure my judgment for sin. For all their sin. I'd far rather suffer than them."

That's what's happening here: Jesus is conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the virgin Mary to be the Savior; and as the Savior, He's going to the cross. That cross on the hill is supposed to be for you; the way the Law reads, you're supposed to suffer God's judgment for your sins. But Jesus takes on flesh and blood in order to take your place. That tiny heart will soon be beating so that He can shed blood for you. Those hands and feet are budding in Mary's womb in order to receive the nails that will hold Him to the cross...the cross that's supposed to be for you.

So, in this text, Jesus is doing what needs to be done to suffer and die in your place: He's taking on flesh and blood so He can go to the cross meant for you. So He does: He makes that cross His cross, suffers your sentence, dies your death and rises again on the third day. He does that because He's the Savior, and now He keeps on saving. Now that He's gone to that cross and made it His own, He makes it yours-without the suffering-for your salvation. In Holy Baptism, He joins you to His death and resurrection (Ro. 6). Because He joins you to His death, you don't have to die for your sin yourself. Because He joins you to His resurrection, He will raise you, too. By His Word of Absolution, the Word made flesh gives you the forgiveness that He has won for you. And by His holy Supper, the flesh-and-blood Savior gives you His body and blood for the forgiveness of sins.

Do you see why He is conceived by the Holy Ghost in the Virgin's womb? He says, "I will take your place at the cross, so that you can take a place with Me in heaven."

So, with that in mind as you ponder this text this evening, here are four things to consider as you rejoice that Jesus has taken on flesh and blood just like you.

First, the Incarnation declares to you how much God loves and favors you. Jesus did not take on the form of an angel in order to help out angels. He took on human flesh and blood to save you. So highly does the God of heaven and earth prize you that He has sent His Son to become flesh and blood in order to save you. If you doubt that the Lord cherishes you, then look here to Luke 1 where the angel declares to Mary, "The Lord is with you." Jesus is conceived in her because the Lord so earnestly desires your salvation. And now, by His Word and Sacraments, the Lord is with you, too.

Second, the Incarnation declares deliverance for you in Christ. Remember the blessing of the pains that you experience in your flesh and blood, so that they might point you back to your Savior. Your flesh and blood is fascinating and miraculous stuff, as we said before; but it has its limitations. It gets tired, it gets hungry, it gets sick and hurt. It's got some restrictions to it. Yet the Lord consents to become flesh and blood, even though it means that He gets tired and hungry and hurt. He becomes flesh and blood so that He can bear all of your infirmities and weaknesses to the cross. Now, risen

again in the flesh, He promises to deliver you from all of your afflictions as He raises you up bodily from the dead.

Third, the Incarnation provides you with strength against guilt and the accusations of the devil. The devil will do his best to accuse you, perhaps with an argument like this: "You're made of sinful flesh and blood, and you're well aware that you are guilty of many sins of the flesh. That guilt is obvious to all; and because of that sin and guilt, there is no way that you deserve God's favor and eternal life. Quit trusting that you're saved; your own flesh and blood preach to you that you're sinful and lost." When the devil offers up this dish of lies, remember the Incarnation; for then you can say, "It is absolutely true that, with my sinful flesh and sins, I do not deserve God's favor or eternal life. But I don't seek to persuade Him by showing Him my flesh and blood. Instead, I praise Him for His Son's flesh and blood, inseparable from His divine nature. Mine was hopeless, but His has given Me hope. Mine was destined for judgment, so Jesus gave His up for judgment in my place. And now, though mine still struggles with sin, Jesus gives Me His flesh and blood in Holy Communion to forgive me my sins, to strengthen and preserve me in the one true faith unto life everlasting. No, my flesh and blood don't save me. But His is quite sufficient to do the job."

Finally, the Incarnation proclaims to you eternal life. The Lord created Adam and Eve to have sinless, perfect soul and body-an eternal soul and body. Sin and death sought to change all that. But when Jesus rose from the dead, He still had His flesh and blood with Him. And when He ascended into heaven, He remained fully flesh-and-blood human as well as fully divine. Jesus now sits at the right hand of God, and He sits there with flesh and blood just like you. Therefore, you can be all the more sure of your resurrection and eternal life, for He has paved the way for you to heaven, body, blood and all; and there, "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" (Rev. 21:4).

This is why it is so important and worthwhile to hear this text in the Advent season and rejoice in the Incarnation. It is such an important miracle that you confess it each week in the Creed: "Conceived by the Holy Ghost, and born of the Virgin Mary." With these words, you confirm this awesome truth: The Lord would do anything to suffer instead of you, and so He has, even taking on flesh and blood to go to the cross in your place. As Christians, we confess that life begins at conception-your eternal life begins with this conception. It is because of His Incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection that you are forgiven for all of your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.