

God Is Involved

Many times, when we get near a holiday such as Christmas, we have a tendency to overlook the Scripture readings for the time leading up to Christmas. In all of the excitement of Christmas Eve and gift exchanges and the Christmas dinners and visiting family and loved ones, we try to 'rush' to these events and especially overlook the fourth Sunday of Advent. This is especially true when Christmas Day is on a Monday as it is this year. But we would be wise to spend a few moments with these texts, especially the ones from Luke's Gospel account and look beyond the story that Luke is telling us.

In the Gospel reading, we hear the story of the visit of the angel Gabriel to Mary, of Gabriel telling Mary of God's selection of her to bear His Son, Luke tells us more than this story of an angel visiting a poor girl from a backwater town. For his readers who are familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures, our Old Testament, Luke makes references to the past, reminding us of other births that had miraculous overtones, births that were significant to God's Chosen People. Luke's readers would have thought of Isaac's birth to Sarah and Samuel's birth to Hannah. They would have just heard of John the Baptist's birth in the story that Luke just told. While these births would have come to mind, the differences would also have been apparent. Sarah was past the 'normal' age for childbearing while Hannah and Elizabeth, though not as old as Sarah, were near the upper end of childbearing years. Mary, on the other hand, was a young girl and didn't even have marital relations with her betrothed husband, Joseph.

Luke also shows the connection between the birth of Jesus and the Scriptures of old. In Mary's greeting to her cousin Elizabeth, she quotes Hannah's prayer of praise when her son, Samuel, was dedicated to the Lord. Luke

also shows that Jesus' birth is foretold by the prophets and His birth is a fulfillment of those Scriptures. In making the connection with the past and saying that God's promise of sending the people a Messiah are fulfilled through Jesus, then we can believe and trust that the promises given to Elizabeth and Mary concerning their sons will be fulfilled.

I would imagine that more questions than just "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" went through Mary's mind after Gabriel told her what was going to happen. Did she have any apprehension about carrying the Son of God during her pregnancy? Did she wonder if she could be a good enough mother to raise this special boy? Did she even wonder if this was a mistake and Gabriel read the address that he was given wrong and should have been somewhere else? Did she wonder why God would want to send His Son to a small, rural town that wasn't near the epicenter of religious thought and activity? Wouldn't God send His Son to a family that could raise him in a manner that would befit a king? Did she wonder what she did that God thought that she was could give birth to God's Son?

While many times these kinds of questions do not really warrant serious thought about them, I think in this case we should consider them. Because of the scope of these and other questions that could be posed from this story actually do have important implications for us, addressing them individually in a thoughtful manner would not be possible in a setting like this, but they should be considered, nonetheless. What many of these questions point to is that God has been faithful in God's promises to the people and we can be sure of fulfillment of promises that will be fulfilled by the Messiah, by Jesus. More importantly, from

this story by Luke and the other Gospel writers, we can be certain of the real presence of God with us today.

But what does all this matter to us? Should it matter to us, especially if we are of the mindset that the main thing Jesus did for us was to give us eternal life; that the main benefit of believing in Jesus is realized only after we die? Yes, a major component of what Jesus did on the cross does impact our future after death. However, this story, in fact the whole Biblical story tells us of a God who created and is involved in His creation. Throughout the Bible, there are numerous references to God being a potter and we are the clay. However, unlike a potter who does not like how the piece of clay is turning out, they can smash it down and start over; God does not crush us down and start over. God becomes involved in our daily lives, pointing us the way we should go, giving us hope for the present. Having this kind of hope tells us that we are more than what others say that we are; we are more than what others let us do or don't do. This kind of hope tells us that we are a child of the Creator, the One from whom all life flows, the One without whom life is finite. Being a child of God gives us the courage to see what is wrong with the world and to be a voice crying out to right those wrongs. Last week in John's Gospel account, the words of John the Baptist give us another assurance that God is among us. Recall that John the Baptist declared that there "Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal." (John 1:26-27 NRSV) This tells us about the real presence of God, whether we recognize it or not. Not just God, in an ethereal form, but as one of us.

So, as we make those last minute preparations for celebrating the coming of God to us as one of us: let us remember that Jesus is still among us; giving us

what we need for today along with promises about the future; encouraging us along the way to look outward towards others as He did, meeting their needs; and assuring us that along the way, Emmanuel, God is with us, is here for us.

YouTube Links:

Gospel and Sermon: <https://youtu.be/ZrVNGCVgKjI>

Service: https://youtu.be/r_PcSk6BUj8