

The Festival of the Annunciation of our Lord

St. Luke 1:26-38

March 25th, 2021

Sts. Peter and Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC

Simpsonville, SC

Pastor Jerald Dulas

Rejoice, Highly Favored One

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Almighty God, Who of Thy great mercy didst cause Thy Son to be conceived by the Holy Ghost, and to become incarnate of the Blessed Virgin Mary according to the angel's annunciation: Grant us by Thy grace, that our sinful conception may be purified by His holy conception, through the same, Thy beloved Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, one true God, world without end. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

When we celebrate the Festival of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary to her relative Elizabeth on July 2nd, we are celebrating Christmas in July, for that is a festival of Christmas. Today, we celebrate another festival of Christmas, the Festival of the Annunciation of our Lord. This time, our celebration of Christmas falls in Lent. A celebration of Christmas in Lent seems to be out of place. Christmas is a season of joy over our Lord's birth and incarnation. Lent is a season of penitential reflection both upon our sin and upon the sufferings and death of our dear Lord + Jesus, the Christ. Why then is there a festival of joy in the midst of a season of penitential reflection upon our sin and the sacrifice that our Lord + Jesus made for us? Because liturgically speaking we are nine months from the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord. Nine months is the gestation period of a human child. Our Lord's birth is in nine months. This year it just happens to fall during the Lenten season.

But this is actually a fortunate occurrence. For it focuses our attention once more upon the incarnation of our Lord + Jesus, the Christ. If our Lord + Jesus does not take upon Himself our flesh and blood, there can be no salvation. If our Lord + Jesus does not perfectly fulfill the Law of God as a man, there can be no salvation. If His works of obedience to the Law of God are not done as one of us, His perfect fulfilling of the Law would not avail the rest of mankind at all. Furthermore, if our Lord + Jesus does not offer up the perfect and innocent sacrifice of Himself on the tree of the holy cross, there can be no redemption for us poor, miserable sinners.

The cross of our Lord + Jesus, upon which we have fixed our eyes, only makes atonement for our sins if the Lord God comes down from Heaven and takes upon Himself our flesh. It is only through His incarnation—His becoming Man—that we have atonement for our sins, and justification of our sins through faith in Him. If our Lord + Jesus does not do this on our behalf, we have no hope of salvation, for we can do nothing to satisfy the wrath of the heavenly Father over our disobedience to His Law. We can do nothing to merit salvation through our own thoughts, words and deeds, because they are soiled with sin. Without the Lord + Jesus, there remains a veil—a separation—between man and God that cannot be breached through our own strivings and workings.

Someone asked me recently why we veil the images of our Lord's crucifixion during Passiontide.

Would it not make more sense to *not* cover them during this season when our focus is entirely on the sufferings and death—the Passion—of our Lord + Jesus? The reason the crucifix is veiled during this season is the veil is a physical representation of the veil—the separation—that exists between God and man on account of the sinfulness of mankind. In the temple of the Lord, a veil separated the Holy Place, where only the priests—the sons of Aaron—could go and no one else, and the Most Holy Place, where the mercyseat—the throne of the Lord God—sat. Only the high priest could enter into the Most Holy Place, and then only once a year, and only if he brought with him sacrificial blood to sprinkle the mercy seat and appease the wrath of the Lord God over his sins and the sins of the people of Israel.

This veil was a physical reminder that there existed a separation—a breach—between man and the Lord God on account of the sinfulness of mankind. The crucifixes are covered as a physical reminder to us that on account of our sin there exists a separation between the Lord God and us. At our Lord’s death, the veil in the temple was torn in two from head to foot. The separation that existed between man and the Lord God was removed. The breach was repaired on account of our Lord’s suffering and death; His innocent suffering and death. This is why on Good Friday during the Divine Service—the Service where we hear about our Lord’s suffering and death for us—the veils on the crucifixes are removed, so that we see that on account of the crucifixion of our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ, the breach between man and the Lord God on account of sin no longer exists for those who cling to Him and His sacrifice in faith.

This why the Angel Gabriel tells the Blessed Virgin Mary to “rejoice.” This is why she is a “highly favored one.” She can rejoice as the highly favored one for she is the virgin chosen to bring forth the Lord God incarnated as a Baby Boy. She will conceive in her womb of the Holy Ghost—Who will overshadow her—and she will give birth to the Savior of the world.

This is also why we can rejoice on this festival day, even though we are in the midst of Lent, for our Lord + Jesus was incarnate of the Holy Ghost and born of the Blessed Virgin Mary, in order that He might fulfill the Law of God perfectly when we could not. And so that He might offer up His life as a ransom for ours on the tree of the holy cross. He hung in darkness bearing our sin and feeling the wrath of the Lord God, in order that the separation that existed between man and the Lord God on account of the transgression of Adam and Eve, and all their children, might be removed. We can now have peace and concord with the Lord God. We are now united to Him through faith. We can now rightly call Him our Savior, for He has rescued us all from our sins; the sins that separated us from Him.

Through the incarnation of our Lord + Jesus; by His taking upon Himself our flesh, He can now inherit the throne of His father David. On the throne of the holy cross, He inherits the throne of His father David. He suffers and dies for the sins of all mankind and splits the veil of the temple in two so that He may now take His inheritance upon the mercy seat of the Lord God. The Blood He shed on the tree of the cross fully atones for the sins of the whole world, once and for all. The wrath of the Lord God is appeased; therefore, He can rule all those who believe on Him from His throne of grace. From this mercy seat He intercedes on our behalf to the heavenly Father. His wounds atone for our sins.

When we cling in faith to the wounds of our incarnate Lord and Savior, we are justified on account of His suffering and death, and we are now no longer separated by sin from our Lord and God, but we are united to Him in perfect fellowship and are made members of His eternal Kingdom. Of this Kingdom there will be no end. The Lord + Jesus rules over the house of Jacob as the rightful heir for all eternity. In this Kingdom we will rejoice eternally as saints who are highly favored by the Lord God on account of our faith, even as the Blessed Virgin Mary gets to rejoice with all the saints that the Baby Boy to whom she gave birth as become the Savior of all mankind by tearing in two the veil of separation that divided mankind from their Triune Lord God.

Therefore, my dear friends, let us rejoice that we get to celebrate Christmas in the midst of Lent.

For our Lord God has come down from Heaven and has taken upon Himself our flesh, in order that He might unite us to Himself through His death. On account of this we get to rejoice that through our Lord's suffering and death, we have communion with the Lord God, and we will forever be considered highly favored ones as we rejoice in Heaven for all eternity. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Merciful God, heavenly Father, Whom it hath pleased that Thy dear Son by the message of an angel should assume our flesh from the body of the Blessed Virgin, grant, we beseech Thee, that by firm faith in this divine mystery we may obtain the blessed fruits of His holy incarnation, pardon for our guilt and the renewal of our minds unto life everlasting; through the same Thy Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!