**The Annunciation**

Grace, Mercy and Peace unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

This evening we consider the Annunciation of our Lord. The day when the angel Gabriel announced to Mary that God highly favored her. And over the next 9 months the Lord's presence would become abundantly clear. And throughout the rest of her life Mary's faith would be confirmed countless times. ---Mary expected good from the Lord. God's promised salvation had long been awaited throughout Israel's history. Years and years in expectation and hope.

The same is true for all Christians; our lives are filled with expectation of good from the Lord. Waiting patiently for His blessings, years and years of learning what true heavenly blessings are, receiving them, and keeping hope in spite of all challenges.

---This is what Mary believed, "God had delivered His people in the past, there is no reason to doubt Him now." Even with *this sign* that is as **high as the heavens above and as deep as Sheol below**. *This sign* is beyond human comprehension, it is grasped only by faith, yet even history demonstrates its truth. ---It is certainly true that Jesus did many miracles, He assembled the lame, He made strong those cast off. The Lord brings peace to His people through His death and resurrection.

This is why He was born, to die and rise. And His resurrection declares that He truly is first born Son of the Most High. And He is also the first born son of lowly Mary. Mary conceived in her womb and bore a son, His name is Jesus. Jesus means "the Lord Saves." Fitting it is that we bless the most highly favored lady.

She is a model of faithfulness for us to follow. ---Even when you don't understand, trust God. ---This is faith. ---Not blind faith as our heathen neighbors mock, but confidence precisely because you have seen God at work, assurance because His Word has not failed you yet. ---And it never will.

Mary had faith but she didn't understand so she asked for explanation. **And she 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.** It is okay to ask questions to God, to ask questions about His salvation. He will answer, not always to our comprehension or immediately, but He doesn't leave those whom He favors without satisfaction. The Lord shows you His salvation.

---By the working of the Holy Spirit, God's salvation comes. The Holy Spirit came upon Mary, by a miracle a son was given to her and she named Him Jesus. ---The same is true in you, God works a miracle, not a virgin birth, but something rightly called wonderful and glorious. He creates faith, you are set free from sin and doubt and dread. You are given a Savior, and with Mary you cling to the Lord in faith. ---As the angel exhorted Mary, "Do not be afraid." So, also, you should not be afraid. Don't be afraid of the lies of the world that deny the miraculous work of God. Don't be afraid to bear reproach for believing God's Word. Don't be afraid to seek explanation from God, and don't be afraid when you don't fully understand. ---Don't be afraid to trust in Jesus your Savior.

---No doubt, it was not easy for Mary to be pregnant while being a virgin. Not only was it contrary to all natural understanding, many surely mocked her and falsely called her a fornicator or an adulteress. Malicious lies are still promoted by the Devil today. One was started immediately by Jewish sources who claimed that Jesus' father was a Roman soldier, not God. ---The unbelieving world will fabricate any lie to deceive people and lead them away from God's salvation. All around Truth is replaced with a lie, the miraculous is replaced with the reasonable.

But, God does *His* work of salvation, challenging man's comprehension of nature. It is not reasonable or natural for a virgin to conceive and bear a son; but this is how God saves.

---It is also not reasonable or natural for men to die, but the world says that this is the natural cycle of life. The process of evolution, the weak die and the strong survive. We are surrounded by a culture of doubt and hate and unbelief. The world clings to a culture of death but this was not God's intention. Only because mankind has fallen away from faith and into sin has it been appointed for us once to die. But do not be afraid.

Jesus miraculously comes into this world of lies, to give hope in the midst of a culture of death, to live and die and overcome death. He lives, Who once was born of Mary.

It was appointed by God our Father that Jesus would be born of Mary so that He might accomplish our salvation. This is beyond our ability, it is beyond our comprehension.

We were captive to the ways of death, we were lonely and mourning in exile, burdened by our sins and guilt and failings, overshadowed with doubt and shame. But God comes to be with you. Emmanuel, Jesus, God with us, ransoming you from exile, cheering you with His presence.

Even as Mary was **overshadowed by the power of the Most High,** and God saved her, the Holy Spirit comes to you, too. Jesus saves you. Now you dwell in the shelter of the Most High, you abide in the shadow of the Almighty. He is your refuge and your fortress, your God in whom you trust. He delivers you from snares and death.

---With Mary hold fast to the Lord in love. He alone delivers and protects, His name is Jesus. Throughout her life she treasured up all the words of Jesus in her heart. This is precisely what you do as well. Treasure His promises, find consolation in the midst of all worldly opposition. ---For Mary, it all culminated with an astonishing event, when Jesus rose from the dead. This doesn't just naturally occur, but God is above all nature, ruling from the highest heaven. When her baby boy who had died, rose, He was clearly declared to be the Son of God. It was beyond all doubt, God is trustworthy.

In this Advent season as we remember the annunciation by the angel Gabriel of Jesus' birth to Mary, so, too, do we remember that the angel also came to announce His resurrection. He said to the women, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is risen." ---Why do you seek confidence among the dead lies of this world? Why do you look to the promises of men? ---This Advent season, and throughout your life, walk with Mary, trust in the Lord, seek Him Who once was dead but is now alive forever. Expect good from the Lord. Wait patiently for His blessings. It will all culminate for you when Jesus returns. He has promised an astonishing event - to raise you from the dead. "God had delivered His people in the past, there is no reason to doubt Him now." Amen

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding guard and keep you as you treasure in your hearts and minds Christ Jesus, the Savior born of Mary. Amen