

3. Advent: Christ's birth confirmed (Lk. 1: 26-33)

Dear Listeners,

In these weeks of *Advent*, i.e. the *coming* of the Lord Jesus Christ into this world, we prepare ourselves for the celebration of His birth, for *Christmas*. Last week we heard about His *coming* as included in the birth announcement of *John*, the herald of the King. The angel Gabriel came to Zechariah and said, "Your prayer has been heard; your wife Elizabeth will bear you a *son*." This son will be the *forerunner* of the great King; he will go before the Lord to prepare the way for him. Then we hear how Luke in his account of these events reports on another visit by the angel Gabriel, namely to a virgin named *Mary*. To her he *confirms* the announcement of the birth of the Christ, the King Himself! He will be the *great King*. He is called *great* because He is the *Son of the Most High*!

Great though He may be, however, yet how *humble* is His *coming* into this world. Just the *mother* is informed of her special calling to become the mother of the *Lord* whom she may bring into this world; *others* don't hear about it. Unlike the event of Gabriel's announcement to Zechariah, when the *people* who were waiting outside became aware of something very special having happened to him; *here* no one hears anything. Given the fact that this is the announcement of the birth of a *King*, it is not accompanied of a special message heralded by a royal servant. Of course not, for who is Mary anyway, who would know this Mary who is called here to this special task?! In fact, this is part of the *Messiah's coming in humiliation*; His coming to dwell in the flesh among us, joining us in our disgraced existence. That's how deeply He *humbled* Himself already here, and much more even when at the end of His life He gives Himself over to be crucified! That's the King Jesus Christ, the King whose *birth* is *announced* here! He *emptied* Himself of all His glory in order to save us; He came to deliver us from the misery into which we plunged ourselves! Indeed, that's the King whose coming we celebrate in His first Advent!

So six months after he had come to *Zechariah* to announce the birth of a son, the *herald* of the King, Gabriel, came to *Mary*. The announcement is made in the most *solemn* manner. He came from the highest *heaven* where he stands in the presence of *God*. His *message* this time seems even more *unbelievable* than the previous one! In both instances, therefore, Luke shows clearly that it is God's wonderful *miracle* by which both *John* and *Jesus* are conceived! The conception of *Jesus*, however, will be the *most unique* that will ever be! Dear listener, please realize that this most *unbelievable* announcement of this most *unique* conception is made in such an *extraordinary* way! God sends an angel from the highest heavens, from His very presence, to the earth..., indeed, but *where*? He doesn't go to the *temple*, as in Zechariah's case, the centre of Israel's religious and cultural life, not to the centre of *public or political* life in Israel either, but rather: to a distant

place that was *unknown* to most, to *Nazareth*. It's a town, Luke writes, where Gabriel goes to a virgin, pledged to be married to a man, named Joseph. Who in the world would *know this* place, *this* woman, or *this* man?! Remarkable! Especially since we see Gabriel go on his *most important mission ever*, it's the more remarkable when he is sent to a most unimportant area or place! Yet, that's the *style* of our God! His announcement of the Saviour is not made where *we* would expect it, for the whole matter and way of our salvation doesn't fit *our* expectations! God doesn't fit *our* way or patterns of life. His way fits the life of the *humble*, the ones who know their own insignificance and *humble* state, who realize that salvation couldn't come from *man* whatever; that's *where* God comes with His work of *salvation*! The *gospel* always is full of *surprises*, of *amazing grace*!

Mary, dear listeners, was a *virgin* we read, pledged to be married to a man named Joseph. They hadn't had their wedding day yet nor consummated their marriage; she's still a *virgin*. When the angel enters her abode he starts out with a special *greeting*. The words of his greeting are unusual and special: "Greetings, you who are highly favoured!" She is *highly favoured*, because by the grace of God she may become the mother of the *Saviour*! These words of the angel *moved* Mary, and *troubled* her very, very much. Understandably so, we would say. In Gabriel's greeting you can sense the *excitement* and the *amazement* at the message he is about to bring. No wonder he expresses this in the manner and words of his greeting! It's like a word of congratulation to Mary! Mary, on the other hand, doesn't know what's coming to her. Gabriel may announce to her the great plan God has with her, a *gracious* plan: "you will be with child and give birth to a son, Jesus, Saviour!"

Mary is *favoured*, dear listener, though she is a *sinner* like everyone else; she may bear the *Saviour* of the world! That's how you are *blessed*, indeed, when Jesus the Saviour *enters* your life, by the grace of God, according to the plan of God! There are many today who say "*where is God?*" Well, here He is, your God and Saviour! He is *in His Word*, in His *gift* of Jesus, in the *proclamation* of the gospel, in His *people* who share in His grace in Jesus Christ! He is *the Immanuel*, God with us, in whom God has come very *near* to us, *near* to His people in this broken world! He has brought light in the darkness of our miserable existence. He has shown His *mercy* to Israel, His *grace* to you and me! Yes, but in order to be overwhelmed by this reality, you'll have to know yourself as *sinner*, who is in the gravest *need* for grace! Then you will be able to understand *Mary's* bewilderment, *Mary's* joy and blessedness too, and you will join Mary in singing your praise to God for the fact that He has come to you and known you in your very humble state as sinner in God's eyes!

Now it is in this *humble* abode of Mary, this *simple* girl, that the angel Gabriel comes to visit and to announce the birth of the great king, in the house of David. In Him all the

promises are fulfilled which Samuel made, all that the *prophets* and psalms foretold about Him! He will be great, and you may wonder what *Mary's* expectation has been in that regard: Jesus, her child, on the throne of David, reigning in Jerusalem, driving out the enemies and restoring the peace to Israel? If that were the case, *what has become of it*, you wonder. He became 33 years old on earth and He died a shameful death on the cross; His disciples were plain people mostly without influence in the world. In Jerusalem the throne of David was not restored; rather the city was destroyed in the year 70 and the Jews were dispersed over the world. Still, the *words* of the angel *did come true*, especially since He wanted to be small and simple, humble and plain voluntarily. He received the *royal crown* as reward for His suffering and death. He told His disciples just before His ascension to this throne, "*All authority* in heaven and on earth has been *given to me*." He *is* on His throne in heaven today and He rules from sea to sea, from the River to the ends of the earth! He rules in the hearts of His subjects by His Word and Spirit!

Yes, Jesus *did* become great and He still shows His greatness in defending and preserving His church, saving people by His Word and Spirit! Do *you* also belong to these people, dear listener? And would *you* not also want to share in all His benefits *by faith* and join His people in *church*, hearing the *voice of the church* as you are doing today? Please come, and know yourself invited by the great King Himself!