

Lenten Midweek / The Annunciation of Our Lord • March 25, 2020

St. John's Lutheran Church, Alexandria, VA

Rev. Braun Campbell

Philippians 2:11

“Every Tongue Shall Confess Jesus”

If you'd have asked me a few weeks ago what could have stopped the world in its tracks – people of most every nation, faith, and background – and brought them all together to reckon with the same thing, I don't think anything but “alien invasion” would have come to my mind. But that was a few weeks ago, and here we are today. The coronavirus pandemic has upended daily life for much of humanity. Even as it has physically separated us from each other, it has united us with the reminder that we are mortal, that not everything is under our control. But the current public health crisis isn't what's really bringing us together today.

As we're recording this service, it's the fourth week of Lent. It's also March 25. That's the date on the church calendar which marks the Annunciation of Our Lord, the day when the angel Gabriel proclaimed to Mary that she'd be the mother of the Son of the Most High. (cf. Luke 1:31) By the power of the Word of God, the Word of God became flesh, and Jesus was conceived in Mary's womb. Back in the days of the ancient church, March 25 was thought to be the date of Jesus' crucifixion. And in ancient times, people connected the day of a person's conception with the day of their death. That's why the Annunciation of Our Lord falls on this date – which also happens to be nine months prior to Christmas Day! But the angel Gabriel didn't just proclaim our Savior's birth to Mary; he also proclaimed his name.

“Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Phil. 2:9-11, emphasis added) The name of Jesus gathers us together: here now, online, and in so many other places across time and space. The name of Jesus, the name which means, “Yahweh saves.” Jesus' name tells us who he is and what he's done for us. Jesus' name is what we proclaim as we gather as his people today.

Credo: I believe. A creed is a statement of faith. It shows where you stand. “Jesus is Lord” is one of the earliest creeds of the Christian faith. It confesses that Jesus, the son of Mary, is also the Son of the Most High. It's saying that this Jesus of Nazareth is God. He is the Christ, the Messiah, the rescuer. He's the one through whom “Yahweh saves” all of His creation. For the people of the early church, that confession would have put their lives at risk, going against both the Jewish religious authorities and the Roman government. Saying “Jesus is Lord” isn't simply a statement of belief; it's a declaration that the believer's confidence is in Christ: “Jesus is the one who saves me.” Jesus Christ is Lord. He's the one who saves you, and me, and the rest of humanity.

Throughout the season of Lent, our midweek services have explored this “Hymn of Christ” we find in Philippians 2:5-11. It praises God for His love shown to us through Christ, for Jesus gave up more than we can possibly comprehend. God gives the world grace through His Son, born of Mary. He does it because he knows that we are broken and divided, each of us drawn to care more for ourselves than for each other. He does it so that we broken people might have life and hope. Because of that he's done for us, then, we can confess that Jesus, “Yahweh saves,” is Lord.

As God's people in Christ, you and I are called to confess our faith: to speak out our hope, to live out our hope.

Confess “Jesus is Lord” with your lips. Connect with the people around you in these days when “social distancing” and “self-quarantine” have become trending terms. Check in on your neighbors and friends to how they're doing these days. Speak words of comfort to people whose lives are being shaken. Give them someone to talk with, even if you can't be physically present for them.

Confess “Jesus is Lord” with your life. While it's become more difficult for us to gather in person, that doesn't mean you can't give generously to support your neighbor. If you're healthy and able to do so, consider donating blood; supplies are running low. Pick up groceries and other household supplies for neighbors who can't get out when you do your weekly shopping trip. Contribute additional financial gifts to support people who now unemployed or losing business. (St. John's existing “Helping Hands Fund” supports members of the congregation who are in need, and we've starting a new fund to support the teachers and staff of our Early Childhood Education Center during its closure.) I suspect that new opportunities to serve will continually surface – we might have more on the way here at St. John's, too.

In the days, weeks, and months ahead, we Christians will have an unprecedented opportunity to confess Jesus as our hope – and the hope of the world – with our lips and with our lives. We do all this to the glory of God the Father, our Creator and Sustainer. Jesus our Savior has reconnected us with our Father in heaven who is our strength and salvation. You and I have hope through him, even amid pandemic and stalled economies. As disciples who look ahead to resurrection, we know that Jesus has conquered everything that would separate us from God. And as disciples, we can connect people with God’s grace in Christ right now.

The world might feel like it has stopped in its tracks, or at the least, slowed to a crawl. But no matter how quickly life comes and goes, the name Gabriel proclaimed to Mary is truth: “Yahweh saves.” Jesus Christ is Lord.

Amen.