

Advent 4 / December 20, 2020

Luke 1:30-31

“And the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus.’”

Are you a member of a club? Clubs are organizations of like-minded people; typically dedicated to an activity; such as a tennis or golf; or an interest such as bird watching, or botany. Some clubs are open to the general public, others are reserved exclusively for the rich, powerful and famous. People who have shared a similar experience are sometimes said to be members of “a club.” Although its not an actual organization with membership fees and a constitution, the most famous and exclusive group must be the ex-presidents club. It may seldom if ever meet, depending upon how the members feel about each other. It’s a club in name only, but its name is reserved only for those who have served as President of the United States. In our gospel, Mary became a member of a small and select group of people, those in Scripture who were visited by an angel.

Angels are associated with significant births in the bible. In Genesis, the angel of the Lord found Hagar in the wilderness, as she fled from the anger of Sarah. He told her to return to Sarah, spoke of the child she would bear and told her what to name him, saying, “Behold, you are pregnant and shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael.” In the book of Judges, the angel of the Lord appeared to Samson’s parents to announce his birth and the salvation God would work in Israel through him saying, “he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines.” Prior to visiting Mary, the angel Gabriel visited Zechariah the father of John the Baptizer. He also told Zechariah what name to give the child. A person had to have a very important role in God’s plan of salvation to be visited by an angel. Each of these people had an important part, but no one had a greater role than Mary. She gave birth to God’s Son. The angel acknowledged her role by greeting her with deep respect saying, “Hail, O favoured one, the Lord is with you!”

An angelic visitation certainly was special and everyone who received such a visit, had an important role in God’s plan of salvation. But as Jesus said in reference to John the Baptizer, whom He called the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, “He who is least in the kingdom heaven is greater than he.” Although it was an honour, they received angelic visits not in their honour, but to the Lord’s glory, in His service for the benefit and blessing of all believers. Each one, including Mary, were servants, through whom God prepared for the coming of Him who is truly great in the Kingdom of God; Jesus our Saviour and Lord.

The angel told Mary to “call His name Jesus.” Jesus was a common name in first century Palestine. It was a variation of the name Joshua, which means ‘the Lord is salvation’ or ‘the Lord saves.’ People named their children ‘Jesus’ to remember the salvation God gave Israel through Joshua, who succeeded Moses and led their ancestors out of the wilderness, across the Jordan River and established them in the Promised Land. People named their children Jesus, in hope of the salvation God would give Israel through the promised Messiah. Jesus may have been a common name, but this Jesus was the most uncommon, extraordinary person. The angel Gabriel said, “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most-High. And the Lord God will give to Him the throne of His Father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.” There would be no Jesus like this Jesus!

There are many people named ‘Jesus’ today. It is a common name among Christians in Latin America, but there is no ‘Jesus’ like this Jesus. Conceived by the Spirit of God, He shares in our humanity. God and man, He made peace between God and human beings, through the blood of His cross. St. Paul wrote of Him in Colossians saying, “For in Him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross.” He inherited the promise of an eternal kingdom, spoken to David in 2 Samuel. He establishes God’s kingdom, His righteous reign on earth, beginning in the hearts of those who believe and receive baptism into His death and resurrection. There is no Jesus like this Jesus. The Son of God from eternity, He took on our humanity in time for our eternal deliverance from sin, the devil and death through His death and resurrection!

‘Jesus’ is His personal name, but the title that identifies Him as our Saviour is ‘Christ,’ in Hebrew ‘Messiah,’ which means anointed. The angel Gabriel didn’t use the word ‘Christ’ in his address to Mary, but its function is implied in his description of the child she would bear. The angel said, “And the Lord God will give to Him the throne of His father David.” David was the anointed or christened, king of Israel. The Christ was the man whom God chose and declared King of Israel, through prophetic anointing. When David was a young man, perhaps only

a youth, the Lord sent the prophet Samuel to anoint him king of Israel in his time. Jesus is the anointed King of Israel for eternity.

Jesus received His anointing as the king of Israel, when He was baptized by John. When Jesus was baptized the heavens opened, the Holy Spirit descended and Christened Him. The divine voice declared, "You are my beloved Son whom I love." David was the anointed king of Israel at a certain time. The Lord delivered Israel from many enemies through David during his time, but since he was only a man and a sinful man, David's time came to an end. Jesus is the anointed king of God's people of every time and place. Jesus is a different kind of man. He is the Son of God from eternity and a sinless man according to His humanity. His throne and His kingdom have no end. Through Jesus, the Lord delivers us from every evil of body and every enemy of spirit, in time and for eternity.

Christ is His office. It speaks to what He did to earn our salvation, so that we would receive God's favour in the forgiveness of our sins. Jesus is His personal name. It is the name He wants us to know Him by, because He is our personal Saviour. It is the name through which He fulfilled the demands of the law in our place. It is the name by which He made Himself obedient unto death for our salvation, even death on the cross. There were other people named Jesus in ancient Palestine and in the bible. There are many people named Jesus in the world today, but there is only one Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. St. Paul wrote to the Philippians saying, "Therefore, God highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father."

He wants us to know Him by the name Jesus, because the memory of every act of salvation in the past and every hope for future deliverance are expressed by that name. Every act of salvation God gave through Joshua and the kings of Israel, anticipated the greatest act of salvation God would give through Jesus, who is the Christ. The name Jesus speaks of God's deep love for human beings and of the salvation God extends and offers to every human soul. The Son of God did not cling to the glory He had with the Father from eternity. He emptied Himself, lowered Himself and became a human being named 'Jesus.' Jesus loved His Father and each one of us so deeply and dearly that He offered Himself on the cross as the sacrifice by which our sins are atoned and through which we have peace with God. This Jesus is both our Saviour and our dearest friend.

Angelic visits may have put people in a select group, but through the coming of Jesus, God calls all people into the most important gathering of people; the holy Christian Church. Mary was favoured with the visit of an angel who brought good news that the Saviour would be conceived in her and born through her. All who believe the gospel of God's grace in Jesus and trust in His name are favoured with God's grace in forgiveness and welcomed into His kingdom. May He who entered into Mary through the word and dwelt within her by working of the Holy Spirit, also dwell in our hearts through faith, by the word and working of the Holy Spirit. In Jesus' Name.