



Advent 4 – December 23/24, 2023

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Sermon Theme; The Christmas Forecast

1. A good forecast. 2. An accurate forecast 3. A miraculous forecast

²⁶In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." ²⁹Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. ³¹You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³²He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end." ³⁴"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" ³⁵The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called ^[a]the Son of God. ³⁶Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. ³⁷For no word from God will ever fail." ³⁸"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

Sermon Text; Luke 1: 26-38

In the name of the Savior God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, dear Christian friends,

Weather is a fickle thing here in Minnesota. We'd expect it to be a cold, snowy Christmas, yet here we are: light rain and 45 degrees. I'm dreaming of a green Christmas? Weather is one of those topics we can all relate to because we all have to deal with it. And the old weather adage is still true living here in the Midwest: if you don't like the weather, just wait fifteen minutes, it will change.

Wouldn't it be great if we knew exactly what the weather was going to be on any given day? For example, I remember several years ago when our own Martin Luther College cancelled classes a day early because a Snowmeggedon of 18-24 inches of snow was predicted by the National Weather Service. Speaking as a dad with my own two kids enrolled at the time, it was a little nerve-wracking when we wondered if it was safe for them to travel on icy roads with that prediction. Well on that particular travel day, the entire metro area of New Ulm received less than an INCH of snow. Okay -- nobody's perfect. Even with all our fancy weather computer models and Doppler radar, no meteorologist can predict the weather precisely because no one on earth knows the future.

Of course, only God knows what our weather is going to be like. That's because only God knows everything. The Bible says: **(God) determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name. Great is our God and mighty in power; His understanding has no limit (Psalm 147: 4-5).** God not only knew how that inch of snow would fall in New Ulm, but He also knew how many tiny snowflakes it would take to make an inch of snow because He made each one of them. Doesn't that fact just blow your mind? God not only knows the weather, He sees the future clearly – our future and the future of everyone else. And as Christian believers who trust that God's got everything under His complete loving control, we don't need to know all the tiny details about our future. I've got to remember that too: have the faith of a child that simply holds on tight to our Heavenly Father's hand. But, every so often, it's like God clicks His heavenly remote control and let's us take a sneak peek at what's playing on His heavenly weather channel. That's what happened when God sent the Angel Gabriel to Mary to bring her a Christmas forecast in Luke, chapter 1. We're going to see first of all it was a GOOD forecast. Second, it was an ACCURATE forecast. And finally, it was a MIRACULOUS forecast.

On this night/morning before Christmas, we are talking about Gabriel announcing the birth of Jesus to Mary and how the Savior of the world would enter our world. And what a birth announcement it was.

So what makes a good weather forecast? Clear skies. No precipitation. Smooth sailing. But, that's not exactly the kind of news Gabriel had for Mary in this pregnancy forecast. Mary was a "young thing" of maybe 15 or 16 years old. I say "young thing" intentionally because in the Middle East during Bible times, men treated women like property – a small step or two above the cows and sheep. Mary belonged to Joseph who was technically not her husband yet. What was going to happen when he found out she was pregnant, and not by him? This forecast certainly wasn't ideal.

Even put that aside, and this pregnancy forecast didn't exactly seem real convenient. Think of the physical changes this future mom would experience. And I speak of pregnancy only like a man can: the changes in Mary's body, swollen feet and aching back, the morning sickness, the long trip to Bethlehem on a donkey. Not even our LORD's mother was spared the pains of Eve's curse. But, it was going to get worse. Mary's biggest pain would come as she would get a front row seat to see her first born son twist and moan on a cross paying the debt of the world's sin, of her sin, of our sin.

But, from God's point of view, this was a good forecast. That's why God sent the angel Gabriel to make this birth announcement. Our sermon reading says: **Greetings you who are highly favored. The LORD is with you.** Gabriel didn't get his directions mixed up and appear to the wrong girl at the wrong time. God's grace, His undeserved love was with Mary. And His grace would continue to be with her throughout her life. Mary didn't be afraid and yet, Luke tells us she was **greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.** Literally, the Greek words here are translated she "kept debating with herself." Ever do that before? Second guess

yourself. She kept asking herself questions like: “why an angel? Why this? Why me? She wasn’t finding many answers. Sound familiar?

I don’t believe we would’ve reacted much different. I mean, we’re all for angel decorations on our Christmas trees but a real angel appearing in the middle of our living room would literally rock our world. That’s why real angels always say: ***Don’t be afraid***. Even though this Christmas forecast left a lot of questions unanswered, Mary didn’t need to worry. God chose her. His grace would be with her. No more explanation needed.

Have you ever met an angel? Magazines like *Reader’s Digest* regularly print stories of people who are rescued by angels. Besides being God’s messengers like Gabriel, angels protect His people. There will come a day when we will meet angels who will carry us from this life to the next. And in our last hour, we might be tempted to be afraid, fearful of leaving this world behind. But, when that happens to you, don’t be afraid. Instead, remember the details of our sermon text. Yes, our Christmas forecast is good – like Mary, we have nothing to fear. We have found favor with God, not because we deserved it, but because God kept His promise to send a Savior into our world who rescued us from sin, death, and hell that we might live in heaven forever. Yes, death is in our future ... but because of Christmas, it’s still a good forecast, because eternal life in heaven is in our future too.

Did you ever notice how they give names to hurricanes and even snowstorms? When a storm is forming, I suppose they have to call it something. But, since they have no idea how bad the storm is going to be, so the names don’t always fit. For example, hurricanes like “Bob” and “Fifi” that seem pretty mild were so destructive that their names have been retired.

Since God’s Christmas forecast is always accurate, the name the angel Gabriel announced fit perfectly. He told Mary to call him “Jesus”, which means: “Savior.” In fact, Gabriel predicts several other accurate facts about this Jesus: ***He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of His father David, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; His kingdom will never end.*** Even though most people thought of Jesus as a poor carpenter’s son, Gabriel revealed Jesus’ true beginnings: He is the Son of God. And God forecasted that Jesus will rule as our King forever.

God’s word tells us to honor our elected officials and pray for them, even if they don’t do the right thing. But, if God’s forecast is accurate here, and it is, we can always depend on the Son of David, our true King who is Jesus. He rules with unlimited power and guides us in this life to the next. And so with confidence we know that Jesus’ love is stronger than our weaknesses. All that is included and more in this Christmas forecast that’s accurate.

With modern technology, we can understand the mechanics of our weather. Every 3rd grader knows that when warm, moist air collides with a cool front, the result is snow or

rain. But, even though we know the science behind the weather, the raw power of some storms can bring us to our knees.

So also we fall to our knees as we think about the miracle of the virgin birth. There's no scientific explanation for it, nor can any of us reproduce it in a lab. A virgin named Mary is pregnant by the Holy Spirit? How do you wrap your head around that? God becomes human? Yet, the apostle Paul would go on to explain why in the words of Galatians, chapter 4: ***‘But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.*** The angel Gabriel not only forecasted a powerful miracle here, but he forecasted the miracle of God's grace. Nothing is impossible for God – neither filling a virgin's empty womb, nor filling heaven with sinners like us who sure don't deserve it. And's all that's possible because of Christ, who through faith fills us up with His holiness.

With that same Spirit working in our hearts, the only Christian response we can give is the one Mary gave to the Angel. ***May it be to me as you have said.*** This Christmas forecast is about God using us to bring God's light and love to our dying world. The weather outside can be frightful, but because of Christ and His grace, our mood is still delightful. So no matter what the weather, get ready for Christ to come. And He's coming sooner than you think. Amen.