

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

Title: Immanuel: God with Us!

Lesson: Luke 1:26-38

²⁶ In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

²⁹ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰ But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³² 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, ³³ and 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?"

³⁵ The 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 the Son of God. ³⁶ Even 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. ³⁷ For 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.

It's already the fourth Sunday of Advent. This 4th Sunday of Advent is special because today is both the 4th Sunday of Advent and Christmas Eve. Therefore, our parish will have three regular services in the morning and a combined Christmas Eve service in Clear Lake at 4 p.m. This year's Christmas Eve service will be a bit different, featuring a special Christmas ABC's story service. If the name of this service interests you, I strongly encourage you to come in person. And don't worry, during the Christmas Eve service, we'll still sing "Silent Night" and light candles.

On the 4th Sunday of Advent, the candle we light is called the Angel's Candle. In Luke 1-2, the angel Gabriel appears four times. The name

Gabriel means "God is my strength," and he delivers God's plans and messages to people.

According to the Gospel of Luke, Gabriel first appears to Zechariah, who was working as a priest in the temple. He announces to Zechariah the birth of John the Baptist. However, Zechariah finds it difficult to believe because he and his wife were already old and unable to have children. Nevertheless, as God's word never fails, his wife soon became pregnant with John.

Six months later, the same angel visits a young woman named Mary in the small town of Nazareth in Galilee. Once again, Gabriel has come to deliver an amazing plan of God, this time to Mary. The scene where Gabriel visits Mary to announce the birth of Jesus is very famous, and many famous artists have painted this moment. This scene is called the "Annunciation."

The angel came to Mary and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you" (28). From Mary's perspective, the angel's visit was very unexpected. When she heard that God was with her, she must have felt fearful.

The message the angel conveyed to Mary, "The Lord is with you," is a central theme in the Bible. The term "Immanuel," meaning "God with Us," speaks to the idea of God being with us, especially in the context of the birth of Jesus. Psalm 23 emphasizes the core idea that "God is with me" (Psalm 23:4).

To comfort the startled Mary, the angel continues, saying, "Don't be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God" (30). God's favor means that He is with her, which is essentially Immanuel. Despite this reassurance, Mary remained fearful and trembling. The angel looks at Mary and continues to deliver God's plan: "You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus" (31).

Mary was really surprised and scared when the angel spoke to her. Just the angel showing up was already a big deal for Mary. But when the angel said that God was with her and she would have a baby even though she wasn't married, Mary was super shocked. In Mary's time, people were more conservative, and getting pregnant without being married was a serious issue.

Then, the angel told Mary that the baby she would bear would not be just her son but the Son of God. The angel explained that it wasn't Mary's problem but something that was part of God's plan.

The 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 the Son of God.” (35)

The angel explains to Mary what happened to Zechariah and says that "no word from God will ever fail."

In the Gospel of Matthew, it's mentioned that Joseph, who is engaged to Mary, hears a rumor that she's going to have a baby. Joseph, upon hearing this, probably felt many different emotions. However, because he was a good person, he decided to quietly break off their engagement to keep Mary safe.

But then, God visited Joseph in a dream and reassured him that Mary's baby was part of God's plan. God told Joseph not to be afraid to marry Mary.

“The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel—which means, “God with us.”” (Matthew 1:23)

The plan that Jesus was born to Mary through the Holy Spirit was hard for anyone to believe. It was a very unusual and surprising way, something nobody could have expected. When Mary heard about God's plan from the angel, she felt confused, scared, and nervous. But even so, she agreed to God's amazing plan. By following God's plan, Mary

became the way for God to come into the world. She became part of how God wanted to save the world. The Annunciation shows that the baby Jesus, born to Mary, is both fully God and fully human.

In the same way, we trust that God is always with us. The most wonderful gift God has given us is His presence among us.

When Mary believed and accepted God's plan, the angel left her. Mary, who said, "May your word to me be fulfilled," is shown in the Gospel of Luke as the first great follower of Jesus. She was obedient to God's word and followed as a disciple of God.

Mary is called the Virgin Mary, and she is also known as the Mother of God and Mother of the Church. She's given these names not just because she gave birth to Jesus Christ but also because she obeyed what God told her to do.

May Mary's confession, "I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled," become the confession of us all.

We are not on a faith journey because we are excellent. We're on this journey because God has called and guided us. Our belief in Jesus isn't because we decided to believe in Him; rather, Jesus chose us.

Immanuel: God with Us! God has come to us. He calls each of us by name, making us aware of His presence during this Advent season.

Immanuel: God with Us! When God calls us, it means being part of God's Word and starting a new spiritual life. Being called by God, becoming a Christian, a disciple of Christ, means following God's plan, joining in God's plan, and finding joy in God's joy.

Immanuel: God with Us! God is with all of us. As we welcome the joy of Christmas, I hope and pray that each of us, like Mary, will say, "I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled."

Immanuel: God with Us! God's people say Amen!