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✠ I preach in God's name for God's people. Let my words be from God and for God's people. **Amen**

Good evening.

**What** day is exactly nine months from today? (I'll give you a hint; our lessons and hymns have probably given it away.) Once we realize that Christmas Day is exactly nine months from today, we can see why the Church has designated today as the *The Feast of the Annunciation of Mary*. It's the day when Gabriel appeared to Mary to bring her this news. She would conceive and bear a son, and he will be called Immanuel, *God With us*. Hence, our namesake.

I'm glad, three months after Christmas, to be reminded of it again. Though the stores and retailers tell a different story—because they try to sell it to us for months in advance—Christmas always seems to go by quickly for me. There's the anticipation of Christ's coming in Advent, and then poof—Christmas has come and gone. I'm also glad that the *Annunciation* is right at the end of Lent, just before the beginning of Holy Week, because it forces the reminder that Christ came as an infant in Mary's womb for no other reason than to accomplish the events of Holy Week—to accomplish his death on the cross.

**What** struck me in our Isaiah passage is that, when we look closely, we see that the Lord tries to tell Ahaz both who he is and what he is seeking to accomplish:

*10 Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz: 11 "Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven."*

The problem with Ahaz is that he is very uninterested in hearing what God has to say. He's not interested in God's Word or God's signs. But we are.

From where does our Lord Jesus descend? From as high as heaven. And Jesus has descended from heaven to go where? To go down to Sheol—to that ancient grave of death.

All of us are born, and then we die.

*Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.*

But Christ our Lord was born *to* die. That is why he came into the world. He came to demonstrate his own love for us, and he did this by pouring out all of his life for us. He came to fulfill the law, that he might win for us life—so that this curse of death would be only temporary, instead of being permanent, instead of being eternal. Instead of permanent death, we look forward to unending life with the one who poured out his life for us.

But I will have to save the rest of this for Palm Sunday, for Maundy Thursday, for Good Friday, for the Easter Vigil, and for the many years of those to come. This evening, it's worth reminding ourselves of who Mary is and who Jesus is, from Luke's Gospel.

**Mary** is betrothed: she is promised to Joseph. They will be married. She is a virgin, and therefore there is a real question about where and how this child will arrive in her womb. Will this child be the fruit of her marriage with Joseph? Unequivocally—no. This child will be the fruit of the conception of Mary from the Holy Spirit.

Upon this reality—upon the incarnation—hangs the entirety of our faith. (This is true of the creation, the crucifixion, the resurrection, the ascension, too.)

Any other alternative would not have been sufficient for salvation. Let's explore just two alternatives.

(1) God puts his Son into the womb of Mary.

This may seem like the same thing, but it is not. If Jesus was placed in the womb—and not conceived—then he has nothing of Mary. More bluntly, he would not be a man, but simply someone who looked or seemed like a

man. It's critical to our faith that Jesus is actually a man, actually a member of the human race, actually a descendant of that first man and woman.

Why?

One reason: Every single one of the prophecies claims that the Christ, the Messiah, the Prophet to come is a descendant: a descendant of Eve, a descendant of Abraham, a descendant of Israel, a descendant of David. None of these prophecies could be fulfilled by Jesus if Jesus were not really conceived by Mary, because he wouldn't be the descendant of any of them.

The only way for Jesus to fulfill the prophecies is to be fully man, and to actually be a descendant of Eve, of Abraham, of Israel, of David.

Another alternative:

(2) Mary conceives from Joseph (or someone else), not the Holy Spirit.

If Mary does not conceive by the Holy Spirit, what would that mean about who Jesus is? He would not be divine; he could not be the Son of God.

And so that brings up at least a twofold problem:

First reason: All of the prophecies about the Christ speak about the king with the everlasting kingdom. No mere man could achieve this, for any man would die, and the kingdom would prove to be finite, at an end—not everlasting.

Second reason: No man, woman, or child can keep God's law perfectly and completely. And yet, that is the requirement of the Law. The one who keeps the Law receives the blessing of Life; the one who breaks the Law receives the curse of Death. What man could hope for perfection?

Unless Jesus is the Son of God, he could neither be immortal nor keep God's law to perfect completion. Unless Jesus is the son of Mary, he cannot be a man—cannot fulfill the prophecies.

And so we see that that the Incarnation—and specifically the Conception of Mary by the Holy Spirit—is critical to the infrastructure of our faith.

**Thanks** be to God for Mary's humility. Thanks be to God for God's unfolding salvation in history. Thanks be to God that our Lord Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary and conceived by the Holy Spirit. Thanks be to God our Lord Jesus is both Son of Man and Son of God. Thanks be to God that Jesus has inherited the throne of David, that he will reign forever, and that of his kingdom there will be no end. And thanks be to God that we are citizens *forever* of Christ's eternal kingdom.

For Christ our Lord is worthy of all worship and praise and glory and honor and majesty, now and forever.

**Amen and amen.**