

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

Good evening.

**ON OUR FIRST ADVENT WEDNESDAY** we heard that even Matthew's genealogy reveals the promise of Jesus. And this is because Matthew organizes his entire genealogy around David and around Abraham, two men who are important most because of what God promised to them. In other words, Matthew organizes the genealogy of Jesus around God's promises, because Jesus is the one who fulfills God's promises to God's people.

**LAST WEDNESDAY WE HEARD** that there's no arrival of Jesus, no Christ, without John the Baptist. And that's because John the Baptist was the *promised messenger* of God to prepare the way of the Lord. John the Baptist is therefore another example of God fulfilling his promises to his people.

**THIS EVENING WE HEARD** that the Angel Gabriel brings news to Mary that she will bring forth Jesus into the world.

Mary was troubled from the start, from Gabriel's greeting, trying to understand what he might have meant by: "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!"

Gabriel tells her immediately. This is no ordinary child. He will be "great," "be called the Son of the Most High," will receive "the throne of his father David," "will reign over the house of Jacob forever," and "of his kingdom there will be no end."

Just like that, she will bring forth the one who is the Messiah, the Christ, the child of promise. All that God had promised to do for his people through his Christ, he would do through Jesus, through *her* son. Her son is the Son of the Most High. Her son is the king of Israel. Her son will rule over his kingdom forever.

Mary is the mother of the Son of God; Mary is the mother of the King of Creation. It is an astonishing and astounding thing — this gift of *the* child to Mary. Mary is truly the favored one. No one except for her can ever know what it was like to carry Jesus in her womb, or to nurse him, or to raise him — and yet, she does. She alone is the mother of Jesus.

It is startling and radically countercultural to take this in — no one in the world could have a higher calling than to be the mother of our Lord Jesus. Joseph indeed fathers Jesus, and yet, our Lord Jesus has God as his Father. Yet Mary alone is his mother. Whatever high and noble and good callings there may be for us in this life, there cannot be a higher one than Mary's.

Except, of course, the calling of her son—the calling of our Lord Jesus to give up his life for his people, so that his mother and father and the whole world could be redeemed through him. It's our Lord's sacrifice — his coming down from heaven, his giving up his power and glory, his being born of Mary, his growing up with his parents and in the knowledge of God, his suffering, and his death — which makes him the only one in the whole cosmos fit for ruling forever.

For what king is worthy of rule except the one who sacrifices himself for his people? And so, of course our Lord descended from heaven to the virgin's womb, of course our Lord gave up all might and power and glory, of course our Lord gave up all of himself, including his life, for his people. For only one who was willing to give up all of himself would be fit for rule forever.

And so, immediately we see what qualifies us to rule and to exercise authority, in whichever domains we have been entrusted in this life. We are qualified only insofar as we pour out ourselves for the sake of those for whom we have been given authority. If we are unwilling to pour ourselves out for those to whom we have been entrusted, then we are unfit for that authority, for that dominion, for that stewardship. To rule means to pour

oneself out.

This is what it means to be great: to pour oneself out.

What, after all, are muscles for, if not to be used to the point of failure? What, after all, is the mind for, if not to be taxed to its limit? What, after all, is the body for if not to be exhausted? There is something savory, something pleasant, something incredibly rich, about turning in a full day, about fully using the bodily gifts which we have been given, and then resting for the night — especially for the sake of those whom we love and for those for whom we are responsible.

We can imagine that Mary poured herself out for the sake of Jesus. As she journeyed to Bethlehem; as she escaped with Joseph to Egypt; as she searched for Jesus on their way home to Jerusalem — she poured herself out for the sake of Jesus, because of her great love for him, because of the great responsibility entrusted to her by God.

A mother does something no man can do — bring life into this world. It is a high and virtuous and noble calling. There is nearly nothing like it in the world. Nothing except, of course, that which the church has been entrusted. the great delight and opportunity to participate in making man, woman, and child born again. This is the great work and mission of the church — to have a share in making people born anew, born of water and of the Spirit. In Baptism, of which we will have four this Sunday, God pours his Spirit out upon those who are washed in water in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Through the Church, God births children for his kingdom, of which his Son rules, forever and ever.

If we turn on the news, if we scroll social media, if we overhear gossip, we may become quickly *unconvinced* that the Lord Jesus is *currently* King. We may get the feeling that someone else, or something else, is in charge. We may get the impression that things are going downhill, and fast. We may wonder how this or that has happened again.

But we must also remember that our Lord Jesus was not born the moment that Adam & Eve fell into sin. The world needed to be prepared and ready for his coming first. And at long last, it was ready and it was prepared, and so he came, in the womb of Mary. The Bible puts it this way — he came in the *fullness of time*.

The instant a child is born, we do not expect them to eat solid food, or walk, or speak in paragraphs, but rather, at the right and good time, we prepare our children to be ready for food, for walking, for speaking and for hearing.

So, too, is our Lord's reign as King. At the good and proper and ripe time, our Lord will return, and then things will be made new and right and good. But now is the time of preparation, and of making ourselves and the world ready, for his return. This is the great duty and delight of the Church, and the Lord as King is pleased to bestow this mission upon us.

So we need not fret at the state of the world or our culture—for we trust and know that it will be made right in due time — but rather, for now, we pour ourselves out for the sake of those whom we love, that they and we may be ready for Jesus' return in glory.

We have been given bodies, minds, and hearts; possessions, skills, and money; family, friends, and acquaintances; work, hobbies, and play — and to us these have been given that we may steward them well, that we may pour ourselves out through them for the sake of the one who loves us — our Lord Jesus.

**† All Glory be to God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, now and forever, Amen.**