

4th Sunday of Advent Cycle B December 18, 2011
2Samuel 7:1-5,8b-12,14a,16 Romans 16:25-27 Luke 1:26-38

And here we are, almost 9 months later from this Gospel visitation of Gabriel to Mary. Nine months...almost. A lot can happen in nine months.

Mary's stomach, of course, was growing the whole time. The Son of God was developing throughout the incredibly fascinating process known as pregnancy. Mary, like any expectant mother, must have felt at some point what John the Baptist did to his mother Elizabeth; Jesus must have leapt in Mary's womb at different stages throughout his internal growth. He must have leapt for joy like John did to Elizabeth, expecting to be born very soon.

In fact, at this stage of Mary's pregnancy, from March 25, the date we celebrate Gabriel's visit to Mary known as the Annunciation, to December 17/18, Mary's belly must have been close to the size of our tabernacle over here. She's about due. And what Mary is almost due to deliver is what we cherish and meditate upon and quietly adore in our presence. The tabernacle of Mary was blessed to carry the presence of the same One who continues to bless us with his eternal presence in this sacred space.

But this is the stage of the pregnancy when Jesus had to be kicking within, eager and anticipating the joy of coming out of his mother's womb. Eager to be born. At the same time, almost nine months in such a sacred womb that was prepared at the Immaculate Conception can make us wonder why Jesus would want to enter this world. But the protection and sacredness of Mary's womb is overridden by the greater purpose of his entering our world. Jesus will be released from the protection of nine sacred months into a violent world of sin. Exposing himself to the forces of this world, however, is the only manner in which his power will overcome the enemy of death. He will become like us in this unpredictable world so that we will become like him in a predictable and lasting peace.

Every act of love we perform; every spoken concern toward another; every visit to the sick in hospitals and nursing homes, and to the prisoner; and every purchase we make for the hungry and those without shelter, binds us to the birth of Jesus Christ. Human acts of love and forgiveness tell Jesus that this is a world that is worth being born into. Our loving actions make Mary's pregnancy of Jesus, and his eventual birth, worthwhile in the eyes of our Heavenly father. We give Jesus a reason to come out of the sacred vessel known as Mary.

Mary can grow only so large in the stomach before she must give birth. But setting our personal bar that raises the standard of love in action, we make the announcement to Jesus that says, "Lord, be born. We hope you like what you see. Lord, we know your birth is into a world of violence and war, of gossip and disregard. But Lord, I'm going to do my best with my faith that ensures that your mother's pregnancy and your birth is not in vain. I offer to you good reason why you should come out from your sacred vessel."

This is what Jesus means later on in life when he tells the Pharisees that the Kingdom of God is among them. To be part of the Kingdom is to reveal the presence of God in our midst. This is most explicitly performed through acts of love.

The other day, after a somewhat difficult week for many folks, I was blessed to preside at the funeral of Firefighter Jon Davies, a 17 year veteran of the Worcester Fire

Department. In the process of preparation, I had a somewhat funny thought knowing the funeral was to be streamcast live by TV stations. Meaning, it could be picked up on most any computer. And I was thinking, “Well, if they’re listening down in Alabama or somewhere in Georgia, or even western Pennsylvania to my New England/Worcester accent; they probably won’t have a clue as to what I’m saying.” The same would hold true if the roles were reversed. If we were listening to them.

But addressing our giving Jesus cause and good reason to be released from the tabernacle of Mary, Firefighter Davies’ act of searching for someone who ended up not being there, and in the process losing his life because of that search, is the premier act of love that gives Jesus hope for being born into our world.

Are we not the ones who are to place all our hope in Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection? Of course! But there’s also this spiritual element of providing and giving hope to Jesus. Like the centurion who says “Lord, just say the word from here and my servant will be healed. No need to walk the distance to my house.” This sort of faith gives Jesus hope.

Well, Firefighter Davies traveled to the centurion’s house. And in the process of ultimate sacrifice, he gave Jesus hope that we are indeed worth saving. That the Spirit does live and move and infiltrate our hearts, offsetting a world of violence and war with acts of love. Acts that flow from our faith.

Well, the angel Gabriel departed from Mary, who must have stood there for a few more moments contemplating what this all means. She will come to find out. All of us will be reminded in another week what this all means. That God comes to us in a Rescue vehicle called a stable. That God saves us from ourselves. And that God also saves us because we give Him reason to.