25 March, 2020

Annunciation | Coronatide

The Rev’d Cody E.B. Maynus

L+J

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Amen.

It is important during times of great chaos and anxiety—during global pandemic, for example—to remember that the God of the Universe, the One who creates all things—is right in the midst of us, right here and right now.

The Feast of the Annunciation is a feast of the Incarnation, a feast which celebrates God taking on flesh in the person of Jesus Christ who lived, died, and was resurrected as a human being. As a person with flesh and blood. As a person who experienced everything common to humanity except for sin. As a person who shows up particularly and concretely in history.

God does not enter history in a way that is characteristic of other gods who are worshipped historically. The God of Abraham and Jacob does not enter history as a piece of clay or bronze or gold. The God of Moses and Aaron and Miriam does not enter history as a domineering general or even as a wise judge. The God of Isaiah and Ezekiel and Amos does not enter history as a lusty sovereign or a virginal huntress. The God of Hosts—the God of our Salvation—enters history as a little child, born of a virgin, in poverty and under political oppression.

We encounter in today’s Scripture, a God who is full of surprises, yes, but also a God who is full of love. So full, of love, in fact that God would enter into the fullness—the height, yes, but also the depth—of our common humanity.

God is right in the midst of us, my friends. In the midst of our fears and anxieties. In the midst of our boredom and doubt. Under quarantine and in physical isolation. In Word and in Sacrament. In Body and in Blood.

We are living in an unprecedented time. The Church has weathered crises in the past, but none like the one we are facing today. During previous crises—hurricanes and tornados, terrorist attacks and governmental overreach—the Church has done what the Church does best: come together. The Church has shown up in marvelous (and, truth be told, wretched) ways throughout human history, but in ways that seemed to make sense, ways that drew upon other experiences.

And now, in the age of COVID-19, we are having to innovate. We are having to figure out new ways of being with one another that do no further spread this deadly virus. We are having to make hard pivots with almost no notice. When we might previously have called the community together for prayer and worship, fellowship and support, that in-person gathering which we do from a place of deep instinct is not only impossible, but it’s dangerous.

And yet, we do so as people for whom the Incarnation—for whom the fleshiness of the Christian faith—is not only important, but foundational.

How then are we to navigate? How can we—a people whose identity is Incarnational, who worship a God who enters into history as flesh and blood—how can we exist in what is becoming an almost entirely digital age?

It strikes me, in the Gospel appointed for today’s feast and in the artistic tradition which has sprouted up from it, that the angel Gabriel does not appear to Mary in the temple, as one might expect an angel of the LORD to do. Neither does the angel appear to Mary in a crowded place, like the market or at the well, where there would be a great audience to hear God’s messenger. No, the angel appears to Mary in the quiet and familiarity of her own home.

God’s plan of salvation was announced to the Virgin Mary in the quietness and the solitude of her own home. In the same way, God’s ongoing work of restoration and reconciliation, of grace and wholeness *must* somehow must continue to show up in the quietness and the solitude of our own homes.

We are living in imperfect times, not unlike those in which Jesus Mary was living when the angel visited her. We are not contending, most of us, with conquering occupiers, as were Mary’s people, but we are dealing with a conquering and occupying virus. God is showing up to us much like God showed up to the Virgin Mary: in the quiet, in the solitude, in the known and familiar experiences of our own lives.

We will have opportunity following the Great Thanksgiving—the Church’s greatest prayer of thanksgiving, where the ordinary stuff of bread and wine are made into the Body and the Blood of our Lord Jesus—we will have time to worship Jesus in the quiet and the solitude of our hearts. Mother Portia will put the consecrated Bread, containing the fullness of Jesus’s Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity—into the monstrance. You will be invited, if you would like, to make a Spiritual Communion, using the prayer printed in the bulletin or whatever words spring to your heart. The God of Love—whose love extends to even the most desperate of human experiences—will meet you in that quiet and solitude and will confer upon you the full grace of the Sacrament.

Our choice now, my friends, is the same as Mary’s choice was then: will we accept that the God of Hosts is in the midst of us and offer ourselves to God and to the world? Or will the angel of the LORD pass us and onto another person?

Amen.