

“JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS”

Luke 1:26-38

During our three Advent services this year, we are going to make three journeys to the Holy Land. Unlike a month ago, there will be no bus rides or jet lag. The Word of God is going to carry us to three cities that are very important to the Christmas story. The three cities are Nazareth, Bethlehem, and Jerusalem.

All three of these ancient cities are still in existence today. People have lived in them for thousands of years. These are real places that thousands of tourists will visit in the next few weeks. There were thousands of tourists when we were there. And for the last two thousand years, Christians from all over the world have made the journey to these cities, so that they can walk in the footsteps of Christ Himself.

Our first destination is Nazareth. It was one of our first destinations in Israel. Currently, Nazareth would be classified as a city. It is high up on a hill. In Jesus day, the entire area of the town would fit inside the courtyard of the church of the Annunciation. The church was built over the cave where, traditionally, the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and announced

that she would be the mother of the Messiah.

Walking around there was amazing. Nazareth was a tiny town. We kept saying to each other, “This is where Jesus grew up.” “This is where He played as a child.” “This is really the place.”

And God sends His angel to tell this young girl that she will be with child, and the Savior of the world would be born to a girl from Nazareth. Small town; ancient world; news of a pregnant girl would not make for an easy life. But rather than focusing on what the people of Nazareth were thinking about this unwed mother, who Joseph still marries, (because we know what they were thinking) let us take a look at what God was thinking.

Nazareth is a small town in Galilee. Galilee is the smaller, northern portion of Israel. Judea is the larger, southern area of Israel. Samaria, where the Samaritans lived, was in between those two regions. The relationship between Judea and Galilee is a lot like the relationship between the Chicago area and down-state Illinois. The Galileans were like the downstaters of ancient Israel. They had an accent -- quite different from Chicago. If you remember, on the night of Jesus’ trial, Peter was recognized as one of the disciples because his accent gave him away.

Not only did Jesus come from Galilee, but He was from Nazareth. Nazareth was an inconsequential little town on top of a

hill that did not have much to offer. Telling someone that you were from Nazareth was not going to impress anyone.

This was clearly demonstrated when Christ called Philip to be one of His disciples. Philip went and told his friend Nathaniel that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah that Moses and the prophets had foretold. And Nathaniel said, "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" [Jn. 1:46].

It would be like if we were waiting for the Messiah to be born and we heard that he came from Marblehead. We would ask, why would he come from there? Why would God do that? The King of the Jews will be born in Bethlehem and raised in the shadow of the Temple. The King of Israel would never come from a place like Nazareth.

That is what many people thought of Nazareth. But God does not look at life and society in the way that the world does. God chose a young woman named Mary from an insignificant little town to be the mother of the Lord of all; to be the mother of the King of Israel; to be the mother of the Savior of the world.

The season of Advent has historically been considered a penitential season, much in the way that Lent is a penitential season, a season when we humble ourselves to recognize Christ's humility.

Our culture tends to view this season as a joyous, happy time.

We decorate, sing Christmas carols, give gifts, and do all of the other things that have become a part of the Advent and Christmas Season. And there is nothing wrong with that.

However, tonight, as we celebrate the angel Gabriel's announcement to this young woman from Nazareth that she will conceive and bear a child who will be called the Son of God, we remember that when Christ was conceived of the Holy Spirit, this marked the beginning of His humiliation on earth. God Himself suppresses His divine nature to be conceived and born as a mortal human being. No greater act of humility has ever been seen by the world.

Advent and Christmas are certainly joyful times of the year, because God bestowed this great gift to us. God sent His Son into the world so that His plan of salvation could be fulfilled.

However, this is also a penitential time of year, because we know what happens to this blessed child of Mary who is named Jesus of Nazareth. 33 years after the birth of our Lord, Jesus of Nazareth was a name that was written for everyone to see. Nazareth was no longer an unknown, inconsequential little town.

As John records: "Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS." Amen.