

“Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews”

Luke 1:26-38

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David.

During our three Advent services this year, we will travel to three cities in the Holy Land. Unlike 14 years ago when I got to actually travel there. I can't believe it has been 14 years since the Cardinals won their 11th World Series title. It happened while we were over there. I still have not watched a replay of game 7. We just heard about it. (But I have watched the end of game 6 many times.) Anyway, this Advent season, we are going to allow the Word of God to carry us to three cities that are very important to the Advent and 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, even with all the turmoil over there, tens of thousands of tourists will visit in the next few

weeks (It use to be hundreds of thousands). There were thousands upon thousands 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 destination today is Nazareth. It was one of our first destinations when we went to Israel. I was surprised at how high up on a hill it is. Currently, Nazareth would be classified as a city. It is decent sized compared to the other towns in Galilee. 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 place where, traditionally, the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and announced that she would be the mother of the Messiah.

Walking around there was amazing. As I said, Nazareth was a tiny town is Jesus' day. Somewhere within the grounds of that church was the spot where the angel spoke to Mary. 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; tiny 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, wealthier, 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 were more rural and they had an accent. Don't you find it funny that people in Chicago think that we are the ones with a strange accent? 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 Big Neck. 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 the Jews 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. "It's the most wonderful time of the year" we are told. I don't see a lot of "fasting" going on these days – and I am looking straight in the mirror when I say that. We gather and eat delicious unhealthy food, decorate, sing Christmas carols, shop for gifts, and do all of the other things that have become a part of the Advent Season. And there is nothing wrong with that.

However, today, 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.

Christmas is certainly a joyful time of the year, because God gave this great gift to us. God sent His Son into the world so that His plan of salvation could be fulfilled.

However, Advent is a penitential time of year, and 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.