



Fourth Sunday in Advent

Sermon by Revd Allie Joseph



Sunday 20 December 2020

READINGS

2 Samuel 7: 1-11, 16; Psalm 89: 1-4, 19-27; Romans 16: 25-27; Luke 1: 26-38

In uncertain times, Glad tidings, of great joy!

Greetings St Michaels. We are starting the last week of advent, later this week we will celebrate Christmas. A Christmas like none we have ever experienced. In our Old and New Testament readings we hear how God promises good things to David and Mary. In the Gospel from St Luke, we read of the announcement by the angel. It is so interesting how the angel appears earlier in the chapter to Zacharia and now to Mary, both times bringing the message of a child to be born, Jesus and John the Baptist.

We also had our own announcement this past Monday, when our country had one of our famous family meetings with our president greeting us in those all too familiar words: Greetings my fellow South Africans. The information we received then left all of us with a mixed bag of emotional responses. This week's announcement has direct consequences for all of us, we are all impacted by the second wave of the pandemic, only time will tell how this will all play out. Together we pray for God's mercy and healing over our broken world.

Turning to our appointed text for today we see a promise that starts with David in the Old Testament coming to pass in the New testament, the king with the endless reign is promised as a son to Mary. Here at St Michael's, we celebrate the angels, the bearers of good tidings of great joy. This time the angel brings news of A child will be born.

In the text there are things that I think will be good for us all to hear again:

- ◆ Both Zachariah and Mary were troubled
- ◆ Both were told not to fear
- ◆ Both were promised a son

Now let us look at the visit to Mary:

In a world run by men and woman having little to no place in society, other than that of being related to a man we see that Mary is visited, Mary is acknowledged as the mother of Jesus even when he is acclaimed as being from the line of David. To Mary the angel says, rejoice you highly favoured one. Here is what the greeting means to Mary:

As a young girl who is not married, she knows that what the angel is saying to her will have dire consequences, there was the outside chance she could be stoned to death. To her this was not a good tiding of great joy, rather more like the worst news ever. Being found pregnant at her age and no father to show, would be a hard sell any day, try telling your parents that the father is the Holy Spirit.

When she hears that what is to happen will be done by the highest God and that the Spirit of the Lord will overshadow her, she probably would also have smiled like Sarah when the angel visited her and told her that she would be pregnant soon, Sarah who was an old woman, long past childbearing age.

Mary was young and afraid of being in the presence of the angel and when she looked in her heart, she came up with the most beautiful Yes ever heard, I am the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to your word.

We are fast approaching Christmas and we will soon be running around doing our last Christmas shopping, having elaborate menus worked out. Some of us braving the roads and skies, visiting family and friends, or just going on that long awaited and well-deserved break. In these uncertain times we do not know what the future holds. We move forward in trust, trusting that for us too there will be good tidings of great joy.

Like Mary we are also called to allow the Christ child to change our circumstances and bring hope into a world struggling with loss and pain.

Amidst all the uncertainty and the fatigue, the lack of normalcy and the constant call to vigilance we have been through the worse and we still have a long way to go.

I acknowledge and I am sure that you would agree with the sentiment that there is widespread fear, anxiety, and a terrible sense of loss. If ever we needed some holiday cheer, this is the time.

The angel's words are true to us too, be not afraid for unto you is born a son whom you must name Jesus and like in the book of Isaiah we hear once again those words of assurance: For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. He will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

This is not an attempt to spread a false sense of security, I am not saying that we are not to be cautious and responsible because the virus and the misery it brings to many people every day is real.

Amidst all the uncertainty we can choose to believe in the imminent coming of the Christ child, we do not have to wait for Christmas to be filled with hope and a spirit of expectation because it is true, unto us a child is born. If there is one lesson we learn from the announcement of the angel it is that our present circumstances will not stop Jesus Christ to be born for us.

I pray with you and your family during this time, that you all will be safe and secure and that the blessing of the Christ child fills you with a spirit of goodwill and charity as was experienced at the first Christmas.