

“What is not seen.” Luka 1:26-39

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin’s name was Mary. And he came to her and said, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!” But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?” And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.” And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

Think about this, dear brothers and sisters – if we only had our eyes and ears and all our senses and that’s it, and would not have the Word of God that illuminates us, then we would miss out on the most of what our gracious Father and our Master Jesus wants us to know about ourselves, about Him, about this life and our future.

Distracted by our daily troubles and challenges we easily lose our sight from the majestic and beautiful reality of God’s chosen people in which we all, in fact, daily and richly participate. Just think about our today’s Gospel reading.

It can serve us well as a great illustration of what I just said and also as a great encouragement in more than one way. What would our eyes see and perceive? Nazareth. Small, tiny village in the ancient kingdom of Judea. Probably inhabited by a few hundred people at most. In this village lived a young girl, Mary, she was betrothed to an older man named Joseph.

One day an unexpected guest arrived in the village and went to speak to Mary. Strange man. He delivered his very strange message, really a very strange message and then left. And that was it. That’s how we can perceive it with our senses.

Luckily, blessed you are! for it has pleased the holy and eternal God to share with us His take on this unusual event. Let’s try to see it from our God’s perspective. What we heard today related to us, was one of the greatest, one of the most anticipated events in the history of entire God’s creation. More, that was the event

that our God Himself had been looking forward since the very beginning. You may remember, that two weeks ago we reflected on the 2nd letter of Peter where he wrote that for our God thousand years are like one day.

We can see it reflecting also on this event. The Triune God guides and steers the course of our civilization towards His designated ends. Nothing can hinder or derail His plans. What He has intended, that will take place. Most certainly so.

In Genesis 3, in the very beginning the first Gospel promise is given. The Son of God reveals that He Himself will come to rescue the fallen humanity from this tragic captivity to sin and death and devil.

How will this happen? The offspring of a woman will crash the serpent's head and this courageous and self-sacrificial act will cost Him His life. The offspring of a woman... we all have two parents, none of us can be called the offspring of a woman. What would it mean? But the story goes on...

Two millennia before the events described in our today's Gospel reading, God Yahweh chooses Abraham and promises that through his seed all the families of the earth will be blessed. This marvellous promise then is repeated to his son Isaack and then to his grandson Jacob. (Gen 12, 26, 35)

Their seed... then the promise begins to make more certain shape. This seed will come from the tribe of Judah. Then fast forward thousand years, and we are with the famous king David. It is to him that Yahweh gives the next astounding promise – to his Son God will establish the kingdom that will last forever. (2 Sam 7)

Thus, the Triune God gradually reveals His divine plans for us. Eight centuries BC through Isaiah the prophet He uncovers one more piece of this puzzle. "The virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." (Is 7:14)

Then almost another thousand years later, the time appointed from the beginning arrives. We read the story of Gabriel visiting Mary. No glamour, no divine glory. It looks like a very ordinary conversation between a stranger and a young lady.

But on that day, at that moment, God the Creator of the Universe joined with His creation. The Creator became a creature. Our God became one of us. The eternal One became a being bound by time and space; He will be wearing our flesh, breathing the same air, laughing the same laughs, shedding the same tears.

All of that happened in this small village, with almost no human eyes witnessing it. But on that day God became man, so that He could bring us, His beloved creatures deep into the wonderful divine fellowship with Himself.

Just think about the promises contained in the words of the angel. "You shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most-High. And

the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

Remember, Jesus means “God Yahweh saves”. He will save us from the incurable, deadly disease, from our sin, and then God Himself, the Son of God, will be our Ruler, He Himself will take care of His people.

He will reign to protect and to bless those who want Him to be their Lord. And that reign, that blessed and joy-filled kingdom will have no end, and God’s chosen and beloved will thrive and rejoice there forever. This is what begun on that day.

But there is something else in this event, that can bring great encouragement to us. Think about our situation. How does our situation look when seen through human eyes? Christianity in the West has been on decline for decades and decades.

Christians have moved from being majority to being an ever-shrinking minority. Christianity was the major force that shaped the culture. Now we are more and more rejected by our society and even marginalized.

Our own church, the LCA, for years and years we were growing and expanding, launching new mission ventures, locally and internationally, building new schools, new aged cared facilities, and so on. Great things...

Now, it seems we are disappearing before our eyes, most of our mission efforts have ceased, schools, instead of bringing people into Christian fellowship seem to be achieving the very opposite. Our own families are turning away from Jesus.

How does it look and how does it feel? No glamour, no splendour, no glory... not promising at all. But remember, that is only how it seems for our eyes and for our senses. If only we could see ourselves as our loving God the Father sees us!

Don’t you ever dare to forget that you are His chosen people! He Himself chose you long, long before you were even conceived and born. Long before you were born, He Himself was steering the history so that you could be here.

He Himself has endowed you with His own Holy Spirit. You are God’s temple now, for the Holy God Himself indwells in you and is always with you. Even if you were the last Christian left, then the beauty, the power and the majesty that indwells in you would still infinitely surpass everything in this world.

We are these earthly vessels, but what we carry inside are divine, eternal treasures of all surpassing worth. Yes, this world doesn’t recognize it, it doesn’t value it, for they just don’t know God the Father and Jesus Christ, His only-begotten Son. And even we ourselves too often fail to recognize how much is given to us, how blessed and loved we are. But it is you, each one of you to whom the words of eternal life are given, this marvellous medicine of eternal life, the cure against death and sin,

and the effective protection against the power of the devil. You are the body of Christ, the Church, the most magnificent gathering of remarkable people that has ever existed, destined to indescribable greatness in the age to come. You are the precious treasure of your Father in heaven, and Jesus Christ calls you – His brothers and sisters, His friends. Don't you ever dare to forget it!

We don't see it with our eyes and don't experience it with our senses. But we can see it with our ears as the Word of God reveals it to us, and we can experience it in our hearts and in this community of saints, as the Holy Spirit fills us with deep peace and confidence, with joy and hope, with bravery and gratitude.

Mary couldn't perceive the magnitude of what the angel Gabriel announced to her. No way! But she trusted the message, she trusted the Word of promise that was spoken to her from God, and we know what happened, and now the whole world calls her blessed.

And neither can we perceive on our own, by our own mind and strength, the grandeur of what the Word reveals to us about us and our future. Therefore, I pray that the Holy Spirit and the Lord's presence would overshadow us as it did Mary.

So that we receive the promises of our faithful and mighty God fully trusting Him and saying it together with Mary – “behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” – and when the time is right, that we all would be there to rejoice in the fulfilment of our Father's eternal masterplan.

Then it won't be about promises and hopes anymore. Then we will see our majestic Lord Jesus and our new world with our eyes, and will enjoy it with all our senses. We are going to enjoy it so much. More than you know. Much, much more that you can possibly imagine.

Come, Lord Jesus, come!

Amen.