

So, what’s a Christmas text doing showing up in the middle of Lent? Well, if you were listening closely, you will realize that this text is not about the birth of Jesus; it is about the conception of Jesus. Therefore, if we celebrate Christmas on December 25, then we are right in celebrating His conception exactly nine months before Christmas on March 25. This observance is called the Annunciation because this news was announced to Mary by God’s angel. The Annunciation marks the beginning of Mary’s pregnancy, a very special pregnancy. Mary was pregnant with God. Since we’re probably not used to thinking that way, perhaps a good place to start is to show it isn’t a new thought as far as Christianity is concerned.

Let’s start where we should always start—the Scriptures. (All Scripture quotes are from the NIV.) In our text, it is clear that what was conceived in the Virgin Mary was God. The angel promises two things to Mary in verse 31: “You will be with child”—that is, conceive, become pregnant—and “You will give birth to a son.” He, the Child, the one conceived, the one to be born, will be called “The Son of the Most High,” in other words, God. In verse 35 the angel says, “The holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.” The holy one is to be born. He isn’t yet, but He is still called the holy one, in other words, God.

Going beyond our text for a moment, in verse 43 Elizabeth calls Mary “the mother of my Lord.” “Lord” as used in Luke 1 is always used as the New Testament counterpart to the Old Testament “Yahweh,” the name of God. Elizabeth is saying that Mary is at this very moment of their meeting the mother of the Lord God. Also worthy of note is that since Mary left immediately to visit Elizabeth, Jesus was no bigger than the point of a pin and may have not yet implanted in Mary’s uterine wall! This is who Elizabeth is referring to as her Lord and God.

So, there is ample proof in the Scriptures supporting our theme. But is this one person’s interpretation? No! The Church has upheld this for centuries. Let’s look first at our confessions,

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those writings of the Reformation Era to which we subscribe because they correctly interpret Scripture. “We believe that the Son of man according to His human nature is really exalted to the right hand of God because He was assumed into God when He was conceived by the Holy Spirit in His mother’s womb and His human nature was personally united with the Son of the Most High” (Epitome p. 15, Art. 8, Tappert p. 488).

Various Christian scholars have said the same. Dr. Edward Koehler, who wrote a commentary on the Small Catechism in 1946, says “The Word was made flesh, assumed, took on, a human nature. This happened at the conception of Christ” (*Small Catechism – Annotated* c. 1946 Concordia Theological Seminary Press p. 141). Francis Pieper, a well-known theologian of the 1950s, writes, “For Scripture says, as already pointed out, not only of the grown man, not only of the adolescent boy, not only of the babe in its mother’s arms, but of the embryo in its mother’s womb that it is God the Lord” (*Christian Dogmatics* VI. II p. 84).

Mary was pregnant with God. That may sound a bit strange to us, but it is not new. It is the teaching of Scripture, our Lutheran Confessions, and respected Bible scholars.

Another appropriate point to make is how this theme relates to Lent. Since the Annunciation is always on March 25, it will almost always occur during Lent. The dual theme has always been recognized. It is seen in the collect for the day. “We implore You, O Lord, to pour forth Your grace on us that, as we have known the incarnation of Your Son, Jesus Christ, by the message of the angel, so by His cross and Passion we may be brought to the glory of His resurrection; through our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.” Dr. Pieper who was quoted earlier does a great job linking the two themes. He writes, “Christ passed through all stages of our existence that He might fully remedy our unclean conception and birth” (Ibid).

Mary was pregnant with God. She had to be. Our salvation depends on it. Psalm 51 tells us that we were conceived and born in sin (Psalm 51:5). Isaiah tells us that all the good deeds we

do as we live our lives are nothing but “filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6). Paul tells us that the wages of our sins is death (Romans 3:23), and all we deserve is the wrath and punishment of God (Ephesians 2:3). But Jesus passed through all those stages for us. He took our place in the womb and in birth, redeeming us from our sinful beginning. He took our place as He lived His life for us, covering the “filthy rags” of our deeds with His perfect deeds. He took our place on the cross, redeeming us from the punishment of Hell. He took our place in the grave and rose again, redeeming us from the sting of death and giving us sure and certain hope. Understanding that Mary was pregnant with God gives an even greater meaning to Hebrews passages that tell us Jesus was made just like us in every respect—right down to developing in the womb—except He was without sin (Hebrews 2:14, 4:15).

Mary was pregnant with God. Our salvation depends upon it. But we are not done learning from this pregnancy. It also teaches us of God’s great love for human life. God was involved in this conception, and He was involved in yours as well. His hands, Scripture says, knit you together in your mother’s womb (Psalm 139:13). His hands shaped you and formed you in the womb (Isaiah 44:2). You are not the product of some biological assembly line. You could all have a sticker on the back of your neck saying, “Hand made by God.” That gives life, your life, value. It is value that does not depend upon how well you can see or hear or walk or talk or think, value that does not depend upon how you look or feel, value that does not depend upon your health or the absence of suffering in your life. You are valuable to God because He made you and He loved what He made so much that He was conceived in a womb, born in a stable, suffered on a cross, buried in a tomb. Then He rose again to say “Yes” to it all, to say “Yes” to you, to give you His victory over death and the grave. That’s love. And now that He has paid such a high price for you with His precious blood, He has another reason to value you: He has redeemed you. God loves life from the moment of conception. Life is the work of His creating hands. God loves life from the moment of conception. Life is the work of His redeeming hands.

As we look at God’s great love for life, as we see how every life from the moment of conception is a life created by God and for whom Jesus Christ died, how can we not love life? And yet in our country we have limited our love to those who are born. Even Christians and Christian churches have fallen prey to thinking that a baby in the womb is somehow less worthy of our love. We have succumbed to a variety of slogans to justify our position. “Abortion, well that’s a political issue that doesn’t belong in the church.” “Abortion is a social problem, and we are just here to spread the Gospel.” “Abortion, well, I’m personally opposed to it myself, but I must defend the right of a woman to choose.” We have bought into the lie of this “choice” without taking the time to consider what this choice does to a child created by God and for whom Jesus died. We defend this right without taking the time to consider what this choice does to women. We’ll talk more about that in a minute.

God loves life from the moment of conception. How can we also not love life from the moment of conception? However, our love cannot stop there. A group of Sunday School children was asked to write letters to God. Little Nan wrote, “Dear God, I bet it is very hard for You to love all of everybody in the whole world. There are only four people in our family, and I can never do it.” Standing up for the value of human life must be more than being against abortion. It also means loving “all of everybody.” It means being “For Life” in all stages and conditions. It means having compassion for those caught up in difficult situations and on those who have made mistakes.

It means doing all we can to prevent people from getting into these situations. We need to treat our young people with respect and help them understand that they can make good, God-pleasing choices. They can choose to love their future spouse right now before even knowing who they are by saving themselves for that person in marriage.

When mistakes happen, we need to react with compassion, not condemnation. We need to offer loving, Christian support. One young woman who was struggling in the aftermath of an

abortion said that if just one person had encouraged her not to go through with it, she wouldn't have. But nobody did. There are countless pregnancy centers out there who would welcome such a woman, who would accept her, offer her the love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ, and provide for her needs during and after the pregnancy. That's the response of Christian compassion.

There is another area that calls for a great deal of Christian compassion. There are a tremendous number of women and men who are filled with guilt and despair and hopelessness because of an abortion decision. Abortion seems like such a quick, easy answer. The great abortion lie says, “You really don't have any other choice, but don't worry, it won't hurt much, and it will all be over soon.” Three lies. There are alternatives to abortion, alternatives that give life. Abortion hurts a lot. It hurts physically, it hurts emotionally, it hurts spiritually. And we know now, after 52 years and 65,000,000 abortions, you never get over having an abortion. The pressure to have an abortion in our society is extremely great. There is pressure from boyfriends, parents, friends, counselors. So many women entering abortion clinics really do not want to be there. That is why the emotional and spiritual consequences of an abortion are so high. One refrain heard over and over again from women who have had abortions is, “This sin is too big for even Jesus to forgive.”

People hurting because of wrong choices do not need the condemnation of the Church nor of the pro-life community. They need compassion. They need to hear over and over again the love of God in sending Jesus who would save His people from their sins. More than any other reason, this is why the Church dare not buy into this “these are political issues” excuse. These issues are causing a lot of pain and a lot of hurt. They give God's people tremendous opportunity not just to stand up and call wrong things wrong, but to stand up and declare with compassion what God has done in Jesus to bring hope to those who have done wrong things.

As you continue to prepare for Good Friday and Easter during Lent, remember it all started, not at Christmas, but at Jesus' conception, with Mary's pregnancy. It was a very special

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pregnancy. Mary was pregnant with God. Jesus was God and man from the moment of conception and from that very moment of conception, He was Jesus, Savior, taking our place to save us from our sins. What love God has for us. What love we can share with others from the moment of conception. Amen.