Peace Lutheran Church
Sunday, December 18, 2011
Pr. Bob Coughlin
Luke 1:2338

Have you ever grown impatient waiting for something to happen? For a project to get done or a promise to be fulfilled?

We grow weary, often frustrated as we wait. We have moments of giving up hope that it will ever happen or be completed. We get tired of the way things are and wonder if they will ever be any different.

Some of you know that Dianne and I have been involved in remodeling some of the spaces in our house. It started out as an idea to make a few updates to one room and morphed into a few more changes and then a few more rooms, and pretty soon our plan to change a couple of things turned into a major project.

And when you decide to do most of it yourself, and if "yourself" happens to be an unskilled, inexperienced carpenter/plumber/electrician/tile-guy… well you can imagine how drawn out the process can be.

And I'm tired of it. I want my house to be cleared of clutter and sheet rock dust. I want to be able to find stuff that got packed away seven months ago. I long for order, for things to be right again.

I want to be in a house where I can relax, and not always be reminded by what has yet to be done.

What started as a vision of "what could be", has gotten lost in the "what is" and I am tempted to lose hope, that whatever it is that we wanted to see will never come to pass.

The people of Israel have been in a time of waiting for a long, long time. God was doing a remodeling project of their "house" (*HIS* house).

And they were running out of hope that it would ever get done.

Since the time when God gave a vision to Abraham of abundant descendants being a blessing to all the nations, they have been waiting, wondering what that promise must have meant.

Since Yahweh led them out of slavery in Egypt and into the Promised Land, they have longed for the fulfillment of the hope that God's people would live out that blessing.

Since the time of David, they looked for the ruler whose name would be great and whose throne would be established forever. And God's people would be delivered, not just from political tyranny, but from their own destruction and wreckage that had separated them from God.

To make matters worse, for over 400 years God has been silent. No prophets, no words from the Lord. *Had He forgotten his people? Was there really anything to the stories of our ancestors?*

Still, God's people read the holy scriptures, dutifully worshipped, celebrated the holy days and held on to what little hope they had that God would appear and salvation would come.

I wonder what it was like to have waited for God so long. There must have been a great deal of frustration and disappointment living with promises that were longed for and left unfulfilled year, after year, after year.

To watch your own people struggle under oppression of ruthless rulers, to endure seeing them turn their backs on Yahweh to chase after other gods – gods that promised a quick fix to whatever satisfied their longings.

They gathered a lot of knowledge about God over the centuries – They knew that He is kind, forgiving and steadfast in love. The stories of God's mercy and provision were told and passed down through the generations.

They also knew that the story wasn't finished. There was a chapter yet to come.

And now, the time had come for God to roll out *"the rest of the story"*

What we read today plays with our imagination.

An angel shows up in an insignificant, backwater, "class C" town sent with a message from God. Sent to someone personally selected by God – a servant girl, someone with absolutely zero social status or power; surmised to be between the ages of 13 and 15.

A virgin, engaged to be married to a local carpenter, Joseph, who happened to be a Benjaminite, the tribe of King David. The line from which the promised Messiah would come.

It is the young servant girl, Mary, who is the first to hear the plan, for she is the one in whom God has found favor. We have no record of her doing anything to deserve that honor. It was God's gift. God's grace to her.

Don't you wonder what was going through Mary's head during this encounter? We do read words like *"perplexed"* and *"pondered"*, and that she asked the question *"how can this be?"* when the angel said that she would give birth to the Son of the Most High, in the royal line of David, whose greatness he would surpass and whose rule that would last forever!

This is the Messiah, the long expected one whose name "Jesus" means *"savior",* for he would be the Savior of the world.

The wait is over! The centuries-long hope will be fulfilled! *Finally!*

But who would have thought that it would happen like this?

God… becoming human? Born to a common, no-name, small town, virgin servant girl?

Sounds impossible… well, it actually would be, except for a God for whom nothing is impossible.

That is the God that Mary believed in. Her problem wasn't that God couldn't intervene in human affairs. It was in wrapping her head around the fact that she was the one he would use to do it!

As to the *how*… the angel explains that God's power will surround her and with the Holy Spirit dwelling in her, the result will be things being done which would be unthinkable any other way.

That is the way God has always chosen to work – among us and within us. That is the way the impossible gets done.

Mary is a model for us whose hope in God has faltered, or faded, or gone flat. Many of us have been faced with so many seemingly insurmountable circumstances that we no longer believe in a God that can do the impossible.

She believes that God can do whatever he sets out to do. (His will, will be done)

Trusting in that belief, she replies, *"Here am I, the servant of the Lord"*.

It is in this posture, the heart of a servant, that God has the access he needs to move ahead with his amazing plan to redeem the world.

Mary's humble heart becomes for us an example of the kind of heart God will use to accomplish his will.

Not the heart that says… *"We have never done it that way" or "You know, I got a better idea, yours sounds kind of risky" or "I'll pass this time."*

It is the heart that says, *"I believe you are the God who can do the impossible. In you I put my hope and my trust."* And offers itself as a servant of the Lord.

> Are there places where you have given up hope?
> Is there somewhere or someone in your life that you are tempted to give up?
> Are you so caught up in the "what is" that you have lost sight of "what could be"?

Today's gospel begs the question:

"How might God want to use me to do the impossible?"

And it shows us the way –> a humble heart, ready to serve and obey.