

The Annunciation
Rev. Isaac Bradshaw
2 Samuel 7:1-17, Psalm 132, Romans 16:25-27, Luke 1:26-38

It's something of a cliché these days to talk about how communication has been revolutionized in a few short years. The home telephone, connected to a landline, is basically obsolete. We talk about how no one writes letters, and the near-instantaneous transmission of news. Maybe you're like me, when the amber alert comes across your phone at 2am and you bolt upright from deep sleep to... "WHAT IS HAPPENING?!"

And, of course, it's a cliché because it's basically true. Communication has gone from messengers running or riding horseback across battlefields to telegraphy to wireless radio, to instant wireless communication through vast, interconnected networks of computers. In 1937, when the airship Hindenburg burned on landing, the passionate voice-over from reporter Herb Morrison became the defining moment of that event... But not at the beginning. Instead, a picture of the giant airship in flames appeared in newspapers in the local area first; it wasn't until Morrison's emotional report were rushed back to Chicago overnight, copies pressed and flown across the country, and used as a soundtrack to the movie newsreels that it became indelibly attached to the disaster. It was also the first time that live recordings of an unfolding news event were broadcast over the radio.

Now, we expect live, immediate communication, with analysis in-studio.

But this is contrasted by a peculiarly American fascination with hidden histories, conspiracies, and the much-sought after "scoop" of news. According to some academic sources, as much of 60% of the American public believes in some sort of conspiracy theory, tacking from the broadly believed Kennedy assassination conspiracies to the complex, interdimensional plans of reptilians living as the Royal Family.

We love our hidden history, too. Secrets hidden away for years, only to be decoded and revealed by plucky adventurers; there's a reason *The DaVinci Code* and *National Treasure* are popular pot-boiler novels and movies. Hidden things and conspiracy are deeply buried into our national psyche: Joe Uscinski, a political scientist with the University of Miami, points out that our most basic founding document, the Declaration of Independence, is built on a conspiracy theory: that the King, parliament and all the government of the United Kingdom were conspiring to take away colonists' rights. According to Dr. Uscinski's research, belief in conspiracy and hidden history exists across party line, across gender.

So we hold these two concepts in deep tension: a world in which we expect and demand immediate information, with a high degree of accuracy, and with instant understanding. At the same time, we hold a high expectation of not simply hidden knowledge, but of outright lies. This has created a very strange situation for us to understand what's true and what isn't; what's real and what isn't.

In our readings today we have images of God communicating directly to his people: first, in 2

Samuel, God's we read of the Oracle of Nathan: the promises of God to the people of Israel, an everlasting covenant that God will dwell with his people. The Blessed Virgin receives the annunciation of her role in the fulfillment of that covenant and how her son will establish the everlasting throne of David. In Romans, Paul remarks of the now-unhidden and understood prophecies, once secret, are now made known so the whole world can believe.

What we see, then, is an ongoing, slow revelation of how God will dwell with his people. To David, God promises not simply a temple, but a home. The oracle that the prophet Nathan delivers to David is called the everlasting covenant by British Bible scholar Margaret Barker; she points, importantly, I think, that *there is no reciprocal relationship*. In all the other covenants God makes with Israel or with individual kings or prophets, there is an 'if.' If my people do this, I will be their God. If they do not, I will not. Reciprocation. But this covenant is not reciprocal. There is no contingency. It is almost pure prophecy in the sense of a future prediction. "David will build a temple, I will establish a throne." What makes this covenant everlasting is that it lacks contingency on David's part: no matter what David does, no matter what David fails to do, God will remain faithful to his promise. It is not a business arrangement; it is an adoption.

There is a further point to make about this passage. The oracle connects two things that may seem a little odd at first glance. The idea of throne and temple.

This connection is important to understand because of what we read in the Annunciation. It is not merely that a throne and temple will be built separately; the throne and the temple become indistinguishable from one another. The throne promised to David's line exists in and with the Temple.

Recall with me the layout of the Solomon's Temple building. In an open court, an altar of fire for burning the regular sacrifices as well as a large bronze pool for the priests to wash in. The Temple building itself was divided into three sections: an open air porch, and then a sanctuary that held a table for bread offerings, a menorah or seven branched candlestick and a golden altar of incense. Further in and up a set of steps was the Holy of Holies, separated from the Sanctuary by a large curtain. It was here that the oil for anointing a new high priest was kept. It was also here that the Ark of the Covenant was kept, with the original 10 commandments kept in the ark. That was the place where God dwelt; that was God's throne. For the First Temple Israelites, the Temple building itself represented Creation. From the Holy of Holies God reigned; this was where heaven and earth intertwined. Separated by a curtain and only accessed by the high priest once a year, where he was enveloped in incense and literally taken up into the heavens to be with God, to re-establish the covenant between God and

God's people every year. Sin corrupted creation, and sin must be atoned and cleansed from the creation, represented by the Temple building itself.

What God promises to David is not a merely earthly dynasty of kings and crowns, but the destruction of the curtain, the curtain representing that division between God and his

creation. What the Archangel announces to Mary, the hope and culmination of the covenant in 2nd Samuel, is a Great High Priest, a high priest that does not go from the earth into heaven to make an impermanent atonement, but one that comes *from* the Holy of Holies to earth, cleansing and re-setting the relationship between God and God's creation and ensuring the destruction of that curtain. No longer will God dwell separately from the throne of his king, no longer would God be "like" a father to the king: the promised one, the destroyer of the curtain the atoner of his people's sin, would have God as his father. And a virgin, a young girl, as his mother.

Here is where St. Paul's words take on a cosmic, heavy significance. If Jesus our Great High Priest has destroyed the curtain, then there is no boundary between God and his people. The whole world becomes the Holy of Holies. And all people, Jewish, Gentile become priests serving him as priests in the Temple. We are baptized and anointed as priests with water and the holy spirit to be those priests for the temple. I may be going a bit off the lectionary, but at the end, when the Heavenly City comes to earth in Revelation, St. John describes it as a perfect

cube; the same proportions as the Holy of Holies. We should not lose this image: when we say Emmanuel, God with us... We mean it. God is with us, because Jesus is the one who brings the throne to Earth, destroys the curtain, re-creates the entire world, and the entire human family, as the place where God dwells. The establishment of David's throne is the establishment of Jesus' throne. The Good News of the Annunciation, what God is communicating to Mary and to us, is not simply that a human king has come to save us from our political or social enemies, or give us hidden knowledge, but the end of the world as we know it. What we experience now is an almost-but-not-quite; a shadow of things to come.

The Annunciation should shake us to our very core. When God dwells with us, things can't stay the same. Great change is coming; the collapse of the distinction between the world and its Creator is an awful, terrible thing to comprehend. Because unholiness *cannot* enter the Most Holy Place. Darkness cast out, and wickedness put to flight. There are people who will live outside of the Heavenly City. But being American, we hold this Annunciation at arms' length. We want the coming changes tempered, or at least adequately analyzed by experts on TV. We want to see the announcement live, just to make sure, to make our own judgements, to decide whether or not we buy it or whether it's part of a complex scam or conspiracy. Maybe there's something hidden in the message itself? Anything, everything to stop us from acting on the question that the

Annunciation asks us: In the 1st temple, when objects went into the Holy of Holies, they too became holy; so what happens when the Most Holy Place becomes the whole world? What is holy... and what is not? What is your priesthood? How do we treat others if they, too, are dwelling with God in the Holy of Holies, alongside us? How do we treat the poor? How do we treat the rich? What do we do when we choose to treat others dwelling in the Holy of Holies as if they are not holy? How do we react when *we* choose to not be holy? How do we treat the land and the sky and the ocean that forms the new Most Holy Place? Tomorrow when we look to the sky for the Great conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter, an event that happens only

once in 800 years... Will we see simply planets moving in their courses, an astronomical event caused by gravity, a beautiful testament to God's creation... or will we *also* see the lights of the menorah, burning brightly in the sanctuary.

The prophet Nathan, the archangel Gabriel, and the Apostle Paul are communicating to us the Good News of Jesus' imminent coming, of God, not just with us, but with all of his creation. Emmanuel. Let it be to me according to your word.

Amen.