



# “Inbreaking”

Text: Luke 1:26-56

*a sermon by Kevin Fleming*

**Sunday Morning, December 24, 2017**

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH - EVANSVILLE, INDIANA

It's still Advent! We are not moving forward until later today. There are churches that are abandoning Advent this morning, in order to accommodate Christmas Eve being on a Sunday. But to reduce Advent to three Sundays is a bit like getting a meal ready and then leaving it on the table uneaten. Why leave anything undone, especially when you're leaving one of the best parts behind?

At the heart of our worship on this Fourth Sunday of Advent is the visit to Mary of the Angel Gabriel to announce that she would bear the Promised One of God and of her subsequent visit to her relative Elizabeth, who herself was pregnant with a son, which was even more remarkable considering her advanced age.

On the cover of your bulletin is one of my favorite images of this moment. Painted by Henry Ossawa Tanner, an African-American artist from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (you knew I'd mention that!), the painting was completed in 1898 and currently hangs in the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Tanner's use of vibrant colors gives expression to the religious intensity of the moment. Combined with his realistic approach, the painting conveys the marvel and the mystery of this incredible moment.

For me, the angel depicted as a pillar of light speaks a message of in-breaking - of God coming into the world in a new and uniquely profound way. God is up to something - unexpected and unforeseen. God is up to something startling and astonishing. God is up to something so bewildering and out of the blue that it is still hard to believe.

God is coming among humankind and upsetting the apple cart of the way things have been. God is taking on human form, which is more than unusual enough, but in doing that, God is seeking to reorganize the way the world seems to work.

We hear the fullness of that mission in Mary's song, known as "The Magnificat."

    "...he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts,  
    he has brought down the powerful from their thrones...

    and lifted up the lowly,

    he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty..."

God is not coming among us to baptize what we do, to call "holy" that which is clearly "profane." God is not coming among us to sanctify the misuse of power, or to condone oppression and malice.

God is coming among us to upset the apple cart of the mess we have made of God's good creation. Nothing and no one will be spared. Institutions, traditions, long-held ideas and practices – all will be turned on their heads. God will have the earth and its people be what God intended them to be when the idea of creating it all first entered God's mind.

Can God do that? Of course God can, for the earth and everything in it belongs to God. God is breaking in to return the creation to its original plan and intention.

And when it comes to God using a young woman for the purpose of recreating the world, there is no question of the possibility. The late Peter J. Gomes, in one of his Advent sermons, writes:

    We waste our time in seeking out the special hidden, secret qualities that commend God's choices to him; to be God means never having to explain why.

    It is the exercise of power, that the theologians call the sovereignty of God, that allows God to choose what is lowly, ordinary, and of no apparent account to be used for his purposes.

    Any god can making something good out of the exceptional and the extraordinary. It is our God who makes out of nothing, something; who takes nowhere and makes it somewhere; who takes nobody and makes them somebody, and it is this power of transformation that made prophets of the ordinary men and women of Israel.

    It is this power of transformation that made apostles and martyrs out of the ordinary followers of Jesus; it is this power of God that makes things that are out of things that are not; and it is this power of God, moving in ways unknown yet not unseen, that confers upon the simple woman of Nazareth the grace sufficient to her new task as the mother of a new creation.<sup>1</sup>

Such is the power and purpose of our God. God coming among us, changing it all, doing something unexpected and new, challenging our ideas and understandings. God breaking in – and setting all things aright.

At its heart, that is what we are celebrating in Advent and the Christmas yet to come. We are celebrating the certain truth that God is among us now and coming still, to do what God has always done: making something new, reforming what already is, recreating that which has become marred and mottled. God is among us to use us as instruments of new creation – just as God used Mary long ago. God is coming in new ways to overturn the unjust practices and constructs we have created that mistreat some and deface the image of God in others.

God is breaking-in to a world that has done its very best to shut God out. God is breaking-in to disrupt the inequity and injustice of the world. God is breaking-in to reform the power structures and social systems of the world. God is breaking-in to put down prejudice and maltreatment. God is breaking-in to lift up those brought low and bring down those who have been lifted up.

And God will do it, not with the clamor of strife, or the dissonance of calamity, but with the cry of a child in the night.

Prepare the way! God is breaking-in! For now and evermore.  
Amen.

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1.) Peter J. Gomes, *Sermons: Biblical Wisdom for Daily Living*, pp. 11-12



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