

Luke 1: 26-38
Creekside COB
December 18, 2005
The Fourth Sunday in Advent

The God We Are Waiting For
The Miniature, Majestic God

It had been a long day. Tomorrow would be another one, and she needed a good night's sleep. She straightened up a few things in her modest home, and before extinguishing the lamp, she sat, let down her long, dark hair, and began to brush.

She had barely begun when a cold sensation ran through her body. Someone was watching her-- someone, somehow had gotten into her house. Trying not to show her awareness that something was wrong, she kept brushing. Carefully she turned her head to the right and glanced at the door. It was closed. If they had come through it she would have known in an instant. It creaked so loud the neighbors could hear it. Turning a little to the left she glanced at the window. The intruder couldn't have crawled through it. Even if he had, he would have fallen on the little wooden stand holding her personal effects. She certainly would have heard that.

Her heart was racing as she thought of what to do. Should she scream and hope he would run? Should she bolt for the door and cry for help? Should she grab something to defend herself? She put down the brush, laid her hands in her lap, and slowly pivoted on the three-legged chair. If the intruder was there to rob her, she prayed he would do it quickly and be gone. If he intended harm, she prayed he would do it quickly and be gone.

It's funny the things you notice at a time like this. Her lamp seemed to be giving off more light than usual, until she realized the light wasn't from the lamp. As she turned the light grew more intense until she was looking directly at him... or her... or whatever it was. She couldn't tell. The creature's face was tilted

down. The features were difficult to distinguish in the brilliant, white light surrounding it. Shielding her eyes, she watched the strange figure. It seemed to pulse in and out as if it stood at a border between two very different realms.

Terror made her want to run, but it also froze her in place. Its head raised and its eyes opened. They were out of proportion to the rest of its face and their color unlike anything she had ever seen. They were *brilliant* blue.

She didn't know *how* she knew, but the visitor seemed more terrified of her than she was of it. She started to speak, "Who are..." but it raised a hand with a gentle gesture that said, "Hush." He, or she, or whoever would do the talking. The being of light spoke, but with speech more like music than words. It didn't seem accustomed to communicating in words. Its speech wasn't in sync with its mouth. It was strange, but it didn't bother her because it was someone she could understand, even though words weren't uttered.

Moments before, her heart was racing in terror. It was still racing, but now it was "for joy" at what she was told. It was like being in a trance that lasted for hours. Then she was aware of her surroundings. The light was gone, the angel was gone, her house felt cold again, but her heart was on fire. She kept repeating the words sung to her so she wouldn't forget them:

"Hail favored one, the Lord is with you... Don't be afraid. You will bear a son. You will call him Jesus... The Holy Spirit will come upon you. The power of the Most High will overshadow you; the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God."

Come morning, she would visit Elizabeth and tell her what had happened. How would she explain it? There was no way to begin except by prefacing it with, "*You won't believe this...*" When Mary told Elizabeth, Mary broke into singing:

God took one look at me, and look what happened—

**I'm the most fortunate woman on earth!
What God has done for me will never be forgotten...**

***He bared his arm and showed his strength,
scattered the bluffing braggarts.***

**He knocked tyrants off their high horses,
pulled victims out of the mud.**

***The starving poor sat down to a banquet;
the callous rich were set out in the cold.***

He embraced his chosen child Israel:

**he remembered and piled on the mercies, piled
them high.**

***It's exactly what he promised,
beginning with Abraham right up to now.***

Who would have thought that Holy Lord God Almighty would come as he did? The theologians and scholars didn't. The Pharisees and Sadducees didn't. The shepherds and wise men didn't. Mary and Joseph didn't. It wouldn't have occurred to us, either.

They thought there would be no mistaking when the Messiah came. He'll descend on the clouds riding a great white horse with battalions of angels behind him. He'll have the undivided attention of every person on the planet and the fur will fly. Shouldn't a big God do things in a big way? If you wanted to make a movie of it, you would call Steven Spielberg.

But what makes the Christmas story so extraordinary is the *extraordinarily ordinary* way God did it. In the first chapter of 1 Corinthians Paul said:

"Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? The foolishness of God is wiser than men. The weakness of God is stronger than men...God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world to bring to nothing the things that are..."

We are so enamored with size and statistics. We're the richest people on earth; we've got the strongest military, the fastest missiles, and the biggest bombs. Next year Ford comes out with an even bigger SUV, and aren't we grateful that we can "Super-Size" our fast food? In this world rulers get their way through no-nonsense means—at the point of a gun, with wads of cash, and masses of support personnel.

But along comes Christmas, humbling our ideas of what ought to be. For our sakes, the GOD OF ALL became SMALL. God "miniaturized" himself. God wanted to hold us and show us how to live, but we were scared. We were afraid of what would happen to us, so God made a little ball of himself so we could hold him first! God became a human to show us how we are supposed to be human and get us to stop our weary efforts of trying to be God.

Come December 26, there will be long lines of people waiting for exchanges and returns of gifts. In a way, Christmas is all about exchanging our ideas about how the world and God works. We need to exchange our understanding of God's power. While we wait for God to make an epic entry into the world with showings of unimaginable power, and Steven Spielberg works on dazzling special effects to portray it, God silently slips in under the radar of our misunderstanding and fear to show us that God's strength is made perfect in weakness.

I heard a pastor talk about an experience he had as a college student working for a welfare agency. He went with a caseworker to visit a woman who lived with her two children in a two-bedroom tenement apartment. The woman was moving in the few belongings of her 84 year-old mother who just had a stroke that left her incontinent and unable to speak.

The caseworker told her, "*You can't move your mother in with you. You've got all you can handle with two kids and all your other problems. You'll have to feed your mother, diaper her, wash the sheets—nobody expects you to do that for your mother.*" The woman listened, then replied in a determined

voice, *“Well, she done all that for me when I was little, so I reckon I can do it for her now that she needs somebody.”* On the way back to the car the caseworker said, “I don’t know if there’s any hope for these culturally deprived people. Maybe education is the answer.”

Walter Wangerin is a celebrated writer I like to read as Christmas approaches. He is a Lutheran pastor and currently teaches a little west of us at Valparaiso University. As the days approach to our celebration of Jesus’ birth I want to tie a bow around this package with a wonderful piece Wangerin wrote called, *“An Advent Monologue.”*

I love a child. But she is afraid of me. I want to help this child, so terribly in need of help... She is cold, and she is dirty; she lives at the end of a tattered hallway, three flights up in a tenement whose landlord long forgot the human bodies huddled in that place. But I know how to build a fire. I know how to wash a face. She is retarded and aware of her infirmity. But here I am, well traveled throughout the universe, and wise, and willing to share my wisdom.

She sits in a chair all the day long with her back to the door. Her arms are around her knees that are tucked to her chest. Her head is down. She’s hiding. If I could see her and kiss her face, I’d draw the loneliness out of her. She thinks her face is ugly, but I could make it lovely by my love alone.

I love the child, but she is afraid of me. How then can I come to her? Knock on the door? No, she holds her breath at a gentle tap, pretending that she is not home. Loud banging would only send her into shivering tears, for police and bill collectors have troubled her in the past. Should I break down the door or show my face at the window? What terrors I’d cause then. She’s suffering the rapings of kindles men, so she hangs her head.

I’ve called from the hall. I’ve sung her name through cracks in the plaster. But I have a bright trumpet of a voice, and she covers her ears and weeps. She thinks each word is an accusation. I could ignore the door and walls and windows and

stand before her as I am. I could do it, but she hasn't the strength to see it and she would die. She is her own deepest hiding place, and fear and death are the truest doors against me.

How can I come to my beloved? Where's the entrance that will not frighten nor kill her? By what door can love arrive to take the loneliness away, to make her beautiful, as lovely as my sun come morning?

I know what I'll do. I'll make the woman herself my door—and by her body enter in her life. How could she be afraid of her own flesh, of something lowly under her ribs? I'll be the baby waking in her womb. Hush: she'll have the time this way, to know my coming first before I come. When she hangs her head, she shall be looking at me, thinking of me, loving me while I gather in the deepest place of her being. It is an excellent plan.

When I come, my voice shall be so dear to her. When I feed at her breasts, she'll sigh and sing another song, a sweet Magnificat, for she shall feel important then, seeing that another life depends on hers. My need shall make her rich!

And the sins that she has suffered, the hurts at the hands of men, shall be transfigured by my being: I make good come out of evil; I *am* the good come out of evil.

I am her Lord, who loves this woman. And for a while I'll let her mother me. But then I'll grow. And I will take my trumpet once again, which once would kill her. And I'll take her, too, into my arms. And out of that little room in that filthy tenement, I'll bear my mother, my child, alive forever.

She will not fear me for long, now. Look! Look, it is almost happening. I am doing a new thing—don't you perceive it? I am coming among you, a baby.

And my name shall be Emmanuel.