

Pastor Geoffrey R. Boyle  
Advent IV  
18 December 2011  
Grace Lutheran Church, Wichita  
Luke 1:26-38

*In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit*

God remembers the barren.

First it was Sarai, Abraham's wife (Gen 11:30).

Then it was Rebekah, her daughter in law (Gen 29:31).

Then, because Leah was hated, her womb was opened, but Rachel's closed (Gen 29:31).

A bit more obscurely, we find this in the book of Judges:

“There was a certain man of Zorah, of the tribe of the Danites, whose name was Manoah. And his wife was barren and had no children. And the angel of the Lord appeared to the woman and said to her, ‘Behold, you are barren and have not borne children, but you shall conceive and bear a son...for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb, and he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines’ (Judges 13:2-3, 5).

Manoah and his wife did have a son, as the Angel of the Lord promised—his name was Samson.

With all of this we come to today's Gospel reading where we meet two more women without child—

Mary and Elizabeth.

Now, Mary wasn't barren; Elizabeth was.

And just like all the barrenness above—

Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Samson's mom—

the Lord gave the barrenness, and the Lord took it away.

*He* remembers the barren.

That's what makes today's *Annunciation* so profound:

When the Lord remembers the barren, the empty womb, those unable to bear a child,

He sends His angel to Mary:

**“In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph...And the virgin's name was Mary” (Lk 1:26-27).**

For all the women who suffer from empty wombs,  
for all the men unable to produce sons and daughters,  
for all who suffer miscarriage and stillbirth,  
and for a world where such barrenness exists in the first place—

God sent His angel to the virgin Mary, promising a Son.

The angel Gabriel announces to this poor teenager from the backwater town of Nazareth that she'll bear a Son who will be “great” and “will be called the Son of the Most High,” who will be King over the house of David, and who's “kingdom shall have no end.”

That all sounds great, but Mary's a pragmatist.  
She knows how things work.

**"How will this be,"** she asks, **"since I am a virgin"** (Lk 1:34).

Virgins can't conceive.  
And The barren can't bear children.  
That's just how it works.

But not with God.

*With God* **"the barren has borne seven"** (1 Sam 2:5).

"He gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children" (Ps 113:8-9).

Sarai becomes Sarah with the promise of a child:

**"As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her"** (Gen 17:15-16).

Barren Rebekah conceives because the Lord hears the prayer of Isaac (Gen 25:21).

And Rachel's womb finally opens when the Lord remembers her;

**"she bore a son and called his name Joseph, saying, 'May the Lord add to me another son!'"** (Gen 30:22-24).

*God remembers the barren.*

He opens the wombs that were closed.

And today He promises the virgin a Son—  
without even knowing a man.

**"And you shall call His name Jesus"** (Lk 1:31).

Christians sometimes forget how miraculous this all is.

They sometimes forget that virgins don't conceive and that the barren don't bear children.

They sometimes forget what this Jesus is all about—  
and they rarely think He has anything to do with barrenness!

But, in reality, He has everything do with barrenness.

In fact, He came in order to reverse barrenness.

He came as the Son of the heavenly father, but also as Mary's son.

He occupied her womb and is the sign of barrenness being undone!

While barrenness is certainly a curse—

Proverbs lists it among the curses that are never satisfied, that never say "enough"—

barrenness is like Sheol,  
 the bottomless pit, the unquenching fire, the never ending desert,  
 in a word: hell.

It is a curse, a sign of the sinful world.

An empty womb is a sign of death.  
 It's a rejection of the first great commission:

**“Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it”** (Gen 1:28).

And when a womb is closed—  
 you're not in control to open it up.  
 Try as you might—  
 exercises, diets, techniques and magazines—  
 for some they might work, but not for all.

Some are just barren, no explanation why.  
 Death is the same way.

While exercises and diets help along the way,  
 keeping us healthy for a bit longer,  
 once the grave is sealed, there's no coming back.

Or is there?

Isn't that precisely why Jesus came—  
 to reverse the barrenness of the grave?!

He came as the one to defeat death!  
 To open the grave.  
 To give life where the womb was empty and sealed.

*That's* why God sent the angel Gabriel to Mary—  
 to be the Son in a barren world,  
 to be the life surrounded only by death,  
 to be the light that shines in the darkness.

Jesus Christ is the promised Son,  
 the Son promised to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob—  
 all of whom had barren wives.

He is the Son of the Most High God,  
 the King of Israel, the Son of David, the one to reverse barrenness.

And He comes to Mary by the Word of Gabriel.  
 The virgin conceives and bears a Son—He fills the empty womb.

So, **“Sing, O barren one, who did not bear;  
break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who have not been in labor!  
For the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her who is married,”  
says the LORD”** (Isa 54:1; cf. Gal 4:27).

Today we are one week away from celebrating this miraculous birth.  
One week away from peering into the stable with shepherds and angels.  
One week away from proclaiming to a barren world, to *you* a Son is given.

And with this Son, with this Jesus,  
the barren have a song to sing,  
the dead have a joyous chorus that will not end,  
and the empty are filled with good things;  
for Mary, and with her, the world, has found favor with God.

*He remembers the barren.*<sup>1</sup>  
And so He remembers you.

*In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit*

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Katie Schuermann, *He Remembers the Barren* (Fort Wayne: Lutheran Legacy, 2011).