

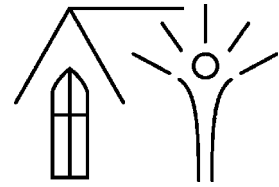


**ROSELLE**  
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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*Our Mission Statement:*

*"To Know Christ,  
To Grow in Christ,  
To Show Others Christ"*



December 18, 2005

**Sermon – “Getting to the Heart of Christmas”**

Luke 1:26-38

Reverend Thomas Kim

I want to begin this message with these questions; "What Do you think the greatest intrusion in human history? What is the greatest intrusion in your life? The coming of Jesus Christ is the greatest intrusion of human life. Advent is the time to wait for Jesus Christ to intrude into our lives. A poet Elizabeth Jennings puts in her book, *Times and Seasons*, the mystery of Advent is this, "It is a mystery, how God took time and entered history."

Who has cable TV at home? You may know about the CNN complex. The syndrome was first identified and named during the Gulf War, when people from around the world were glued to their screens, watching the same battle scenes and ballistic attacks over and over again. The CNN Complex has come to mean more generally the postmodern addiction to news and bulletins, and most generally the postmodern addiction to information. Whether we understand or comprehend the information or not is immaterial. We have become pathologically addicted simply to the information itself. We ingest information without digesting it, and we are doing it all the time.

Doubt it? Try this experiment. Take this test. Next time you see someone glance at their watch, go to them immediately and ask

them the time. How many can tell you without looking at their watch again? Scarcely anyone. Almost everyone you ask will need to consult his or her watch all over again to give you the information you need. We have come to crave information for information's sake, and we take in information constantly without comprehending or conceptualizing it.

The challenge of Advent is to bring us into a world where information becomes knowledge, and knowledge becomes wisdom. Advent breaches our psychological and intellectual and spiritual systems that build up immunities against wonder, mystery, magic and surprise. Advent injects into our bloodstreams powerful infusions of oxygen-producing faith.

We hate surprises -- and do our best to insulate our lives from the unexpected and uncontrolled. But the gospel text this week reminds us that, as we are now in the middle of Advent -- the Season of Surprise -- we had better be on our toes. Today's Scripture lesson begins with the visit of the angel Gabriel to a virgin named Mary, a young woman who is engaged to Joseph, a hometown boy with a good, or at least decent, job.

The angel's visit is alarming — you can understand that — but the announcement is astonishing, and quite frankly, Mary deems it to be impossible: "You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus" (Luke 1:31). This is not necessarily good news to a young woman getting ready for her wedding night.

But Mary is receptive to this news because Gabriel tells her that his name will be Jesus meaning “he will save.” Jesus is described as one who “will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David” (1:32). Gabriel predicts that he will reign over the house of Jacob, and will rule an everlasting kingdom.

Mary ponders this, but not for long. “Here am I,” she says, “the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word” (1:38). A child is accepted, and the course of human history is changed forever.

Our God is a surprising God, who has acted in surprising, unpredictable ways since the creation of Adam. Getting to the heart of Christmas, Advent is a time to prepare for the miraculous birth of Christ into our world --but from year to year we can never really predict just when that event will occur to us in our own lives. Let your spirit float in the sea of the grace of God defenselessly, and empty yourself to welcome the surprise of God in your life without guard.

We have an intrusive God, and Jesus the Christ was the biggest intruder in all of history. His birth, the Word made flesh, was The Great Intrusion -- of eternal into the temporal, the divine into the human, the spiritual into the material. The entire Bible, Old and New Testaments, testifies to the power of an intrusive God to break into our channel-flicking, bed hopping, mall shopping, beer guzzling, chain smoking lifestyles --sometimes by side-swiping, sometimes by rear-ending, sometimes by coming head-on -- with the news of God's amazing grace and love.

Pastor Rob Reid says a true story, “*Who Says God Does not Work in Mysterious Ways.*” The story is known as “The Tablecloth.”

*The brand new pastor was newly assigned to their first ministry, to reopen a church in suburban Brooklyn which was much run down and needed much work. He set a goal to have everything done in time to have their first service on Christmas Eve.*

*He and his wife worked hard, repairing pews, plastering walls, painting, etc, and on December 18 were ahead of schedule and just about finished.*

*On December 19 a terrible tempest - a driving rainstorm hit the area and lasted for two days. On the 21st, the pastor went over to the church. His heart sank when he saw that the roof had leaked, causing a large area of plaster about 20 feet by 8 feet to fall off the front wall of the sanctuary just behind the pulpit, beginning about head high.*

*The pastor cleaned up the mess on the floor, and not knowing what else to do but postpone the Christmas Eve service, headed home. On the way he noticed a flea market type sale for charity so he stopped in.*

*One of the items was a beautiful, handmade, ivory colored, crocheted tablecloth with beautiful work, fine colors and a Cross embroidered right in the center. It was just the right size to cover up the hole in the front wall. He bought it and headed back to the church.*

*By this time it had started to snow. An older woman running from the opposite direction was trying to catch the bus. She missed it. The pastor invited her to wait in the warm church for the next bus 45 minutes later.*

*The pastor got a ladder, hangers, etc., to put up the tablecloth as a wall tapestry. He could hardly believe how beautiful it looked and it covered up the entire problem area.*

*Then the woman walking down the center aisle, "Pastor," she asked, "Where did you get that tablecloth?" The pastor explained. The woman asked him to check the lower right corner to see if the initials, EBG were crocheted into it there. They were. These were the initials of the woman, and she had made this tablecloth 35 years before, in Austria.*

*The woman could hardly believe it as the pastor told how he had just gotten the Tablecloth. The woman explained that during the war, her husband and she were separated.*

*The pastor wanted to give her the tablecloth; but she made the pastor keep it for the church. The pastor insisted on driving her home that was the least he could do. She lived on the other side of Staten Island and was only in Brooklyn for the day for a housecleaning job.*

*What a wonderful service they had on Christmas Eve. The church was almost full. The music and the spirit were great. After the service, an elderly man, whom the pastor recognized from the neighborhood continued to sit in one of the pews and stare, and the pastor wondered why he wasn't leaving.*

*The man asked him where he got the tablecloth on the front wall because it was identical to one that his wife had made years ago when they lived in Austria before the war and how could there be two tablecloths so much alike.*

*He told the pastor how the Nazis came, how he forced his wife to flee for her safety and he was supposed to follow her, but he was arrested and put in a prison. He never saw his wife or his home again all the 35 years in between.*

*The pastor asked him if he would allow him to take him for a little ride. They drove to Staten Island and to the same house where the pastor had taken the woman three days earlier.*

*He helped the man climb the three flights of stairs to the woman's apartment, knocked on the door and he saw the greatest Christmas reunion he could ever imagine.*

(Thanks to Barbara Mizzi for this wonderful story)

You name it a miracle or not, it is the season to open our mind and heart to God, and wait God's intrusion, and surprise and enjoy God's coming to us. Let your spirit float in the sea of the grace of God defenselessly, and empty yourself to welcome the surprise of God in your life without guard.

How about you? Do you trust God enough to let Him surprise you?

Do you trust God enough to let Him surprise you with all kinds of His heavenly wonderful blessings? In verse 38, Mary said, "I am the servant of the Lord. Let this happen to me as You say!"

Put yourself in neutral zone of God's grace; let it happen to you to get to the heart of Christmas. "Let it be with me according to Your word" (1:38)