

The Angel of the End Times

4th Sunday of Advent – Year B

2 Samuel 7:1-5; 8b-12, 14a, 16
Psalms 89:2-3, 4-5, 27, 29

Romans 16:25-27
*Luke 1:26-38***

When we hear the story of the Annunciation, how many of us think of the End Times?

This "end," however, is not to be understood simply as the "end of the world" and the consummation of history, although some Christians might interpret it that way. Catholics, while still awaiting Christ's return in Glory, also understand the "end time" in two ways. First, as a *transition*; the end of one thing and the beginning of another. Second, as a *purpose*; a reason for something to exist or be achieved -- "education is an *end* unto itself."

Regarding the Annunciation, we must remember that Mary's is not the only one found in the Gospel. Matthew tells of an angelic annunciation that Joseph received in a dream. Luke tells of an annunciation to shepherds, given by an angel the night of Jesus' birth. The women receive an annunciation of Christ's Resurrection that first Easter morning when they find the empty tomb. In all three of these examples, however, the angel is not identified.

The Annunciations to Zechariah and Mary (told in that order) contain one

important detail that carries with it important End Time expectations -- the angel is named. To Zechariah, the angel begins unidentified. When Zechariah expresses his doubt, however, the angel dramatically declares -- "*I am Gabriel!*" (Luke 1:19). That same Gabriel then proceeds to Nazareth, six months later, to announce to Mary the impending birth of Jesus.

This dramatic identification would have had strong historical and End Time implications to any Jewish Christians who first heard this story as Luke told it.

The archangel Gabriel is found in only one other Book of the Bible, the Book of Daniel (8:16-17; 9:21-27). Daniel was written

during the middle of the second century BC. By that time, the Jewish people had endured seventy years of exile in Babylon (587 BC), from which they returned under Persian rule (539 BC). For the next 200 years the Jews lived under Persian domination until the conquest of Alexander the Great. After Alexander's death, when his empire was divided between his generals, the Jews lived under Egyptian rule, and later the Syrian rule of the Seleucid Empire. By mid-second



The Angel Gabriel

century, the Jews were enduring a brutal persecution at the hands of their Syrian overlords until the Maccabean revolt, around 165 BC, gave them independence as a kingdom for the first time since 587 BC.

Daniel, while set in the Babylonian Exile, was written during this period to address the issues that sprang from the Syrian-Seleucid persecution. In Chapter 9, Daniel prays to God, asking why his people continue to suffer so terribly under foreign domination. In two of the apocalyptic visions, in answer to Daniel's prayer, Gabriel appears to announce "the end time" (Dan 8:17) - the *end* of persecutions and the *beginning* of restored Israel.

In the Gospel of Luke, Gabriel reappears to again announce the "end time"; the *end* of the reign of sin and death, and the *beginning* of an era of salvation and redemption. The purpose for which God created the world is about to be fulfilled, and

Gabriel, as in Daniel, announced to Zechariah and Mary this great transition, this great fulfillment. Therefore, as Christians, we can say that the "end" or *purpose* of creation is salvation and redemption; announced by Gabriel and

fulfilled in Jesus. In short: we have been living in the End Times for the last two thousand years.

We still await Christ's return in glory. However, when Jesus returns, when that "end" is fulfilled, I will not look for Michael to

defend us on the day of battle, or the earth to open up below, or the stars to fall from the sky. I will be looking for Gabriel, to announce the last great fulfillment; this last great transition from this world to the Kingdom, just as he did to Daniel, to Zechariah and to our Holy Blessed Mother.

Fr. Bill Nicholas
December 16, 2011

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