

## *On the Feast of the Annunciation, The Living Christ is Growing Inside All of Us*

**An Evensong meditation by the Very Rev. Sam Candler  
Observing the Feast of the Annunciation**

*Do not be afraid ... for you have found favor with God.  
And now, you will conceive.  
Luke 1:30-31*

Scientists tell me that, at any given moment, thousands of things are growing inside me. And they are growing inside you, too. Lots of those things are good; blood cells and bone cells, nerve endings, and tissues and organs that together make up this wondrous human body. Over five hundred species of bacteria also live inside us. In fact, there are ten times as many bacterial cells inside us than there are human cells! Most of the bacteria inside us are actually good. I don't see them, but they are good!

But, as we have learned so painfully in the last three years, many of the things growing inside us are not so good. There are also viruses, germs, bad bacteria, even pathogens and toxic agents that would kill us if they were left to grow uncontrolled. Even the healthiest human body always contains thousands of viruses and germs that are not so healthy. This is a fact of life.

It is time to realize, again, that what keeps the human body healthy is that we feed the good elements. We feed the good bacteria and good cells. We pay attention to those unseen elements that are positive and life-giving. Great family therapists, like the late Edwin Friedman, tell us the same thing about families and social systems. At any given moment, every social structure or family system contains elements that are destructive. But the healthy social systems distinguish themselves from the ill and the hopeless. They give energy to hope and to independent life.

This same principle was illustrated in a story told long ago by the Cherokee Indians, who once inhabited this very land around us. In their parable, an old Cherokee grandfather is teaching his grandson about life.

"A fight is going on inside me," he says to the boy. "It is a terrible fight, between two wolves. One wolf is evil; he is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego." But then, the grandfather continues, "The other wolf is good; he is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. This same fight is going on inside you - and inside every other person, too."

The grandson thinks about it for a minute and then asks his grandfather, "Which wolf will win?" The old Cherokee replies simply, "The one I feed."

Right now, in our own time, many other things are growing inside us. Some of us have the germ of fear growing inside us. Perhaps financial worry has affected us, or it has affected people close to us. Or we fear something else about the future. Some of us have the germ of anxiety growing inside us. And that germ of anxiety, the demon of anxiety, has been feeding us for three years.

Fear and anxiety are real, just as real as any pathogen or virus physically grows inside our bodies. Fear and anxiety can grow. Fear and anxiety are like diseases; they can actually infect people around you. Even unseen, these germs can grow.

Christians believe in things seen and unseen, and we believe they can grow. Today, when we remember the Feast of the Annunciation, we have heard again the miraculous story of an annunciation of growth. To the Virgin Mary appears that wondrous angel, speaking words of wisdom and comfort, "Do not fear." Those are almost always the first words of angels to human beings: "do not fear, do not fear." They are words we all need to hear, from generation to generation.

Mary hears about something quite unseen. "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most high will overshadow you; the child to be born will be holy." Mary is pregnant; she will have a child.

As a male, I do not know, nor will I ever know, what it is to have a living person physically growing inside me. I can only imagine that it is one of the most humbling experiences of humanity. That there is life inside us which comes from beyond us, is a humbling experience that exalts us to glory.

I will never know that experience physically. But I can know, and all of us can know, what it is like to have the living Christ growing spiritually inside us. The story of the Virgin Mary is not a story just for women. It is the story of how each of us allows something to grow inside us. That something is the living Christ.

We believe in things seen and unseen. We believe in the power of the Word every Sunday. There are lots of things that can grow inside us: germs and bacteria and viruses. But the living Christ can also grow. The living Christ can also spread. The living Christ can also be contagious!

Let it be. Let it be in us, according to the Word.

AMEN.