

A SIMPLE CHRISTMAS: ADVENT 2 (LOVE)

December 9, 2018

Michael Swartzentruber, Senior Minister



Luke 1:1-26-56

²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you."²⁹But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³²He 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. ³³He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."³⁴Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. ³⁶And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸Then

Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

³⁹In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, ⁴⁰where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ⁴²and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. ⁴³And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

⁴⁶And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; ⁴⁹for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. ⁵⁰His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. ⁵¹He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. ⁵²He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; ⁵³he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. ⁵⁴He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, ⁵⁵according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."⁵⁶And Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

REFLECT & DISCUSS

South Elkhorn Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

4343 Harrodsburg Road • Lexington KY 40513

859.223.1433 • southelkhorncc.org

Context

The birth miracles continue in Luke: first an aged, barren Elizabeth, now a young, betrothed (but not yet married) girl discovers she is destined to give birth. In the ancient world, marriages were arranged between a father and bridegroom. After a year-long engagement, in which the bride lived in the father's home, the bridegroom would come to take the bride to their new home. A week-long wedding celebration would commence. During the year-long engagement, the bride was nevertheless already legally connected to the bridegroom--if the bridegroom were to die, the bride would be considered a widow.

Mary might well have been startled and afraid of the angel, both in terms of awe before the divine *and* because not all divinities had good intentions. A popular folk story of the time from *Tobit* tells of an angel who visited a bride before her wedding only to kill off her bridegroom. "Do not be afraid" is much needed. The words also echo back to the way the prophets received a message from God. Mary, in this sense, is framed as a Prophet of God, one who will give literal and figurative birth to the Word of God.

Mary's responsiveness to Gabriel's presence and message is a portrait of discipleship: from confusion and questioning ("pondering" is meant as a kind of internal debate about what is happening, and she asks the same dis-believing kind of question as Elizabeth did in the story before), to a bold, risk-taking "servant of the word" (see Luke 1:2). What matters about Mary is not that she is a passive birth-mother to Jesus, but that she is an agent and servant for God's life-giving message. Mary is not only Jesus' biological family, she fulfills the criteria for Jesus' spiritual family: "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it" (Luke 8:21). Mary heard the word from God and did it.

Perhaps Mary runs to Elizabeth not simply because she wants to find out if what the angel reported was indeed true, but because Elizabeth might help her feel less alone--someone who might truly understand.

John leaps in the womb and there is a filling of the Holy Spirit from womb to Elizabeth's mouth. This "leap" already fulfills Gabriel's promise to Zechariah that John would be filled with the Holy Spirit even at/before his birth (Luke 1:15).

Mary responds with joy, with words famously called "the Magnificat". These words foreshadow Jesus' own words in the temple (Luke 4) where he shares his life mission statement: to be good news to the poor and set captives free--lifting up the "lowly."

Reflect

1. Read the scripture passage carefully and slowly. What word or image stands out to you? Why?
2. What does it mean to be "favored" by God? What would it mean if we really believed that and lived it? How might your life look or feel differently if you lived that "favor" every day?
3. Mary and Elizabeth might have found solace and strength in their shared experience, even at very different ages. They are both "in this together." Who are the people in your life who you turn to for understanding, who go through what you experience and bring you the blessing of strength?
4. What do you think it was like for Mary once "she returned home"?

Listen Online

Sermon audio available at southelkhorncc.org/sermons