

## **+ Luke 1:39-55 + The Big Arrival Is Coming Soon! + Fourth Sunday in Advent + 20 December 2009 +**

"It's time." A frantic husband whisks his laboring wife to the hospital. "It's time." A graduate makes his way across a stage to receive his diploma. "It's time." The grand notes of a processional soar through the air while a bride begins her way down the aisle. "It's time." The plane carrying a loved one touches down on the runway and creeps to the terminal. "It's time." The UPS website indicates that a special package of Christmas presents is "out for delivery" to you. "It's time." The Savior is coming soon.

Throughout this Advent season, we have spent our time here in worship getting ready for the Big Arrival of our Savior. Jesus told us to watch for and rejoice in it. John the Baptizer called us to prepare for it. God-willing, our anticipation has grown, but now we're just days away from the celebration of Christ's first arrival. With Advent nearly over, are you ready?

Have you taken time to watch and prepare with repentance for Christ's coming, realizing how desperately you need the Savior, or have you left little time to get ready for his Big Arrival as you prepared for parties and presents and dinners and end-of-the-year activities? Have you taken time to rejoice in what the Savior has accomplished, what he still accomplishes, and what he will accomplish all for you, or have you spent your time rejoicing in accomplishments of your own? Are you ready?

In this crazy time of year, getting ready for the Big Arrival of our Savior can fall pretty far down the to-do list with so much else that grabs our attention and complicates our lives. Thankfully, the Lord in his grace has given us another opportunity to take time and get ready. He takes us to the end of the first Advent, where we see **THE BIG ARRIVAL IS COMING SOON!**

"It's time." After thousands of years of waiting, nine months would be like the blink of an eye. Yes, preparations needed to be made. Anticipation and excitement was growing, but Messiah was finally coming. Countless generations had watched and waited for his Big Arrival, but had passed away before he came. Now, however, it was time.

It seems Mary understood that in spite of all the problems and complications the Messiah's Big Arrival would cause in her life. Mary was a young woman in her mid-teens. She had probably always dreamed of being a mom with kids. She had no real reason to expect that to happen before she was married. She was still a virgin and was engaged to a godly, local carpenter named Joseph. Back then, that was considered a binding legal marriage with all the responsibilities and none of the privileges until the wedding feast about a year later. Mary had every reason to believe that in time she would be a mother, but then an angel brought a message from God that changed everything. ***"You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus... The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.*** (Luke 1:31, 35) It's time."

After the angel had left her, Mary started packing. She needed to prepare for this Big Arrival and wanted to celebrate, but to do that meant leaving town for a time. Mary was an unmarried, engaged teenager who had just found she was pregnant. Few, if any, would've believed that this child came from God himself. Some might even try to stone her to death for infidelity. Even if they didn't, most would question her reputation from then on.

It almost makes you wonder what was going through Mary's mind as she hurried to get ready for her trip. There were probably plenty of concerns and unanswered questions, perhaps even a little fear of the unknown, but most of all there was anticipation and excitement. The long-expected Savior was coming! It was time to celebrate, so Mary left to visit her dear elderly relative Elizabeth, of whom the angel had said, ***"Even Elizabeth, your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God."*** (Luke 1:36-37)

When Mary entered Elizabeth's home and greeted her, the child within Elizabeth's womb leaped. Babies like to move around in their mother's womb kicking and pushing, but this was a special movement. This was an unborn child celebrating the arrival of his Savior. The Holy Spirit led Elizabeth to celebrate too, giving thanks for the Lord's blessing on Mary and his people. ***"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!"***

Elizabeth had every reason to celebrate. For many years, she had been barren, but the child within her womb was no miracle of science and fertility drugs. He was a gift from God. That son, John, would prepare the way for the coming Savior. With Elizabeth's baby on the way, it was just a matter of time before the Messiah himself would arrive. That's why it was time to celebrate. Elizabeth correctly identified Mary as ***"the mother of my Lord"***. In only

nine months, Mary would give birth to Jesus, the Savior of the world. After so many years of waiting, the Big Arrival would finally come.

Remarkably, Mary was ready. She didn't let the potential glory and fame and blessing get to her head. Look how she celebrated! She sang a song of glory to her Lord, humbly confessing her need for the Savior, while joyfully praising her Lord for his grace and mercy. She sang, ***"My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, because the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers."*** It was time to celebrate God's mercy that had finally sent the Savior.

Are you as ready as Mary for the Big Arrival of Christ? Are you as ready as the unborn John and his mother Elizabeth to celebrate Christ's coming? Here we are in the final days of another Advent, but few of us would readily admit we are ready. Our focus is pulled in so many different directions the closer we come to Christmas. It's no surprise that at this time of year, Satan works hardest to distract and pull away the focus of God's people with sales and stuff and activities and difficulties and troubles.

How can you be ready for the Big Arrival? You can't get ready with more frantic doing. You can't get ready with a focus on what you have done or what you hope to do. You can't get ready with some kind of payback for what Christ comes to bring. All of that only leaves you hopelessly unprepared not only for the celebration of Christ's first arrival, but also for his return.

The Big Arrival is coming soon, so how do you get ready? You get ready by going back to the Gospel in Word and Sacraments. There the Savior pours out his mercy. In the Word, the Lord reminds you of how ill-prepared you are and how desperately you need a Savior. That Word takes you back to the sin of your first parents and how that sin has spread from generation to generation to today where it rears its ugly head in every one of us, even you.

That same Word also points you to the Savior, whose very presence in Mary's womb was a miracle of God's merciful love. In the Word, Jesus comes to you and shows you all he did for you. That child of Mary was born in a Bethlehem stable. He grew up every moment living a perfect life, never demanding glory and praise for himself, but always deserving thanksgiving and worship as the Son of God. Eventually that loving mercy took him to a cross to die for you and for all your sins, to cleanse you of all your guilt, forgiveness he guaranteed when he rose from the dead, but there's more.

Christ doesn't just tell you about it in his Word. He also pours out his mercy in the waters of Holy Baptism. There in the water and the Word, your sinful, unprepared nature is crucified with Christ and a new self arises, made holy in Jesus' blood, ready to receive all God's promises with confident trust. To those life-giving waters, you can daily return to drown that sinful nature and receive again God's promise of forgiveness through Jesus.

The Savior pours out his mercy in the feast of his Holy Supper. There Christ gives you his holy body and blood with bread and wine for the forgiveness of sins, strength for new life, and the assurance of your salvation. Through the Gospel, then, Jesus gets you ready to celebrate what he has done for you, even when the busyness of the season tries to overwhelm you.

Jesus also helps you celebrate what is coming. Mary and Elizabeth were still in their own little Advent seasons getting ready for his Big Arrival. So they watched and prepared and rejoiced. As another Advent season nears its end, realize that Advent is about more than getting ready for Christmas. ***"Behold, I am coming soon"*** (Revelation 22:7), the Savior promises at the end of Revelation. Soon it will be time for the Big Arrival on the Last Day, when Jesus will come to gather his people and bring them home to heaven. Like Mary and Elizabeth, through faith in Christ, you can watch and prepare and rejoice. Even as you look into the manger and see the cross behind it, your eyes can lift heavenward waiting for Christ's return. ***"The Mighty One has done great things"*** for you in a womb and a manger and on a cross. He will certainly fulfill that final promise, and with his help, you'll be ready.

There are only five days until Christmas, but still time to get ready for the Big Arrival! Pause for a moment and let the great things God has done for you through Christ take your breath away. As you make your final Advent preparations, keep this ancient prayer on your lips, ***"O Emmanuel, our King and our Lord, the anointed for the nations and their Savior: Come and save us, O Lord our God."*** (from *The Great "O" Antiphons*) God's answer to that prayer is coming soon. It's time to get ready, so watch, prepare, rejoice! Amen.