

+ Luke 1:46-55 + How Will You Celebrate His Coming? + 4th Sunday in Advent + 20 December 2015 +

How do you celebrate good news? I suppose it depends on the good news. Finding out that someone paid it forward for your meal in the fast food drive thru might lead you to do the same for the person in the car behind you. Finding out that you actually aced an exam for which you spent hours studying might bring out a shout of joy. Hearing the proposal of your fiancé may bring laughter and tears of joy. The same goes for hearing the good news that you and your spouse are expecting a child—although that one might cause a stunned, silly smile to come across your face. If your favorite team just scored the winning touchdown or basket or got the game-winning hit, the room might erupt with cheering and maybe a few happy dances.

A year ago this past week, our congregation got some great news—our synod's Church Extension Fund approved our financing to expand and renovate our facility. I got the news while standing in a long line at the post office. There's only so much shouting and cheering you can do in that setting—so a quiet, excited prayer of thanks and a great big grin had to do because it was such great news to celebrate. We were finally going to build!! The more vocal celebrating followed after I left the post office.

During this Advent season, we have been preparing for the coming of our Savior-King, Jesus Christ. We know who he is—the King of kings who first came in humility to put himself in our place to rescue us from sin and Satan and death, but who will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead. We know what amazing gifts he will bring—confident hope and expectant joy. We've prepared with repentant hearts, with endurance and peace and unity. We've looked forward to his coming with hearts full of hope. Now today we prepare to celebrate. There's some good news that the Lord has for us this morning—good news that causes us to celebrate just as it caused a young virgin named Mary to celebrate 2,000 years ago. So **HOW WILL YOU CELEBRATE HIS COMING?**

Mary was a young, Jewish teenager who lived in Nazareth—basically a backwater town in a backwater region of a backwater country in the Roman Empire. There was nothing impressive about it, and probably nothing impressive about her family life. Mary likely grew up in a rather poor, but God-fearing family, who could trace its lineage back to King David—Israel's greatest king. They looked forward to the coming of the Messiah—God's Anointed One who would save his people from their sins.

Now Mary had probably dreamed of one day being a mom with kids, but she had no 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, who could also trace his family line back to King David. Back then, engagement was considered a binding legal marriage with all the responsibilities and none of the privileges until the wedding feast about a year later. Mary's life was the common life of an Old Testament believer.

All of that changed, though, when an angel brought a message from the Most High God himself. ***"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)

Try to imagine what suddenly went through Mary's mind when she heard that news. It was shocking enough that an actual angel appeared in her home, but then to find out that she was going to be the mother of a child who would also be the Son of God? You would expect her to be stunned into silence. Surely her mind raced with unanswered questions, some fear of the unknown, and lots of eager, excited hope, but she humbly trusted the angel's message. ***"I am the Lord's servant, May it be to me as you have said."*** (Luke 1:38) The Savior was finally coming! What a great reason to celebrate!

As amazing as that news was, Mary couldn't celebrate quite yet. You see, Mary was an engaged teenager who had just found out she was pregnant, but not by her fiancé Joseph. Who would believe that this child came from God himself? Some might even try to stone her to death for infidelity, which was allowed by the law. Most would probably question her reputation from that point on. So Mary left town to visit her dear elderly relative Elizabeth about whom the angel had said, ***"For nothing is impossible with God."***

You see, the Lord had allowed Elizabeth and Zechariah in their old age to conceive a child—a son who would grow up to prepare the way for this coming Savior. If anyone would understand Mary's situation and be able to celebrate with her, it would be Elizabeth—and that's exactly what happened. When Mary arrived, the Holy Spirit caused both Elizabeth and her unborn child to rejoice. ***"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!” (Luke 1:42-45) The Savior was coming. So they celebrated!

How would you celebrate this good news? When it comes to Christmas, does it ever seem like it's all about you? What did you get? What didn't you get? What did you give? What sale or deal were you able to get? Where did you go? What did you have? Who were you with? Do you measure how “good” a Christmas is by what you got and what you did? Does a sense of pride bubble up inside of you because you gave the best gift of all or at least gave some money or donated some toys? It's pretty easy and pretty tempting to make your Christmas celebrations all about you, isn't it? Yet such an attitude only robs the Christ Child of the glory he deserves.

Thankfully you don't hear that kind of self-centered pride in Mary's celebration. You might expect Mary to react with some self-centered pride. “The Lord chose ME to bear the Savior? I must be pretty special!” You might expect Mary to celebrate how great she was, but instead she glorified her Lord, humbly confessing her need for the Savior, while joyfully praising her Lord for his glorious and undeserved grace in sending that Savior.

“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.” Mary praised the Lord of grace because he was her ***“Savior.”*** Mary was fully aware how sinful she was. She was fully aware how much she needed that Savior within her womb. Even as a young woman, Mary knew how God's holy Law reminded her how far she fell short of the Lord's perfection every day. She needed that Savior as much as anyone else because, like every one of us, she deserved nothing, but God's eternal condemnation for her sin.

Out of undeserved loving-kindness for Mary and ever sinner, God provided that Savior. ***“From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name.”*** Mary wasn't celebrating because people would remember her as the mother of God. No, she celebrated because the Lord had done great things for her. Yes, in his grace, he allowed her to be the mother of God, but he would accomplish greater things through the Child in her womb. That Child would be born in humility, born under God's holy Law to deliver everyone under that Law. That Child would fulfill all the ancient prophecies with his perfect life and innocent death as the Substitute for all people. So Mary celebrated.

As you get ready for Christmas, you, too, can celebrate by giving glory to God alone. In fact, you have an advantage! When Mary sang this song, Jesus had yet to accomplish everything he came to do as Savior. Yet you and I have the privilege of knowing the rest of the story of our Savior as it's recorded in his Word. Celebrating Christmas isn't about how special you are, but about giving glory to God alone because of what he's done for you!

...And that's exactly what Mary did! She sang of the Lord's mighty mercy. ***“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.”***

Mary rejoiced because the Lord had shown mercy to her and to all who by faith put their hope in the Lord. The Lord had shown mercy by fulfilling his promise of grace to the believers of old in sending the Messiah, who had come to save his people from their sins. So Mary celebrated God's mercy!

In a similar way, we celebrate our Savior's first coming as we remember the Lord's countless acts of mercy. Every year we begin this journey to a lowly manger to see the Christ Child, the Word made flesh born in a Bethlehem stable. We recall how that Child grew up and carried out great deeds of mighty mercy while living a perfect life, never demanding glory and praise for himself, but always deserving thanksgiving and worship as the Son of God. We also see the shadow of the cross loom before that Child and recall how loving mercy took him to the cross to die for you and all your sins, to cleanse you of all your guilt with forgiveness that he then guaranteed with an empty tomb. At Christmas we too celebrate God's mighty mercy.

Christmas is only a few days away and our Advent preparations are winding down. So let's celebrate! Celebrate what God has done to save you, and revel in the amazing miracle of the Christ Child. Celebrate what God is accomplishing even now in your heart, and rejoice when you hear his Word or when you recall your Baptism and how God made you his own or when you receive his Supper for forgiveness and life. Celebrate that God will accomplish what he has promised in his Word to bring you to be with him in heaven

and to come again in glory. Above all, celebrate this Christmas because your Savior-King is coming soon!
Amen.