

Obedient Faith of Mary **"When God Comes with Blessing"**

Texts Micah 5:2-5a

Hebrews 10:5-10 (Series C, 4th Sunday in Advent) Luke 1:46-55 or Ps. 80:1-7

Luke 1:39-55 (46-55)

Let us pray:

We light the Candle of Love on this final and only partial week of Advent. Here is yet another chance for us to pause in the midst of all the busy-ness. Listen deeply to the reading from Micah, as he names the very town from which the *one who is to rule Israel* is to come and, further he says, when *she who is in labor* brings forth her child the rest of Israel will return home. A Prophecy that applies to us also.

Once Israel was physically away from her homeland, they were promised a return. Once we were alienated from God and through the Christ Child we were brought home. That is the good news of God's blessing the world through the Christ child. The words of the angel Gabriel, Elizabeth and Mary continue to inspire the hearts of Christian people around the world today as they have for countless generations.

Though ancient, these words come to us with new fresh air, they revive our spirits with the wonder of a God who comes to us with blessing when we hear them. Many of the phrases in these verses of scripture are some of the most beloved treasures in all of the bible.

- *"...nothing will be impossible with God." [1:37]*
- *"...let it be with me according to your word." [1:38]*
- *"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb." [1:42]*
- *"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour..." [1:46]*

And then in the midst of Mary's song, there are these incredibly powerful words of promise and good news to those who are most in need of good news - innovative words of honest *"liberty and justice for all!"* "God has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. [1:52-53]

Our scripture reading from the gospel of Luke today is the heart of the "Good News" and the amazing story of what it is like when God comes with blessing. Mary's response to the angel Gabriel's message is a model of *Obedient Faith and Loving obedience* to the God who calls to us in the midst of our daily lives.

Let us do a little Bible study here. Case in point Mary's actions in our text points to; (1) *News that must be shared*, (2) *News that must be celebrated*, and (3) *News that must be lived*.

- **News that must be shared:**

As soon as the angel Gabriel departed from Mary - Mary took to the hills to visit her cousin Elizabeth. There was news to share. Elizabeth and Mary both had amazing stories to tell each other and Mary's news was news that was literally "*earth shaking*." When God gives good news, it is news that must be shared.

All of us are here today because someone shared God's good news with us. Perhaps it was parents or Christian teachers, or a neighbour. Maybe it was a friend. But someone brought God's good news to us and our lives are richly different because of it.

As we bask in the spirit of joy, it is good to ask ourselves, "*Who do I know that is in need of God's good news today?*" As Mary's heart turned to her cousin Elizabeth when she received the news, so the most natural thing in the world is that our hearts be turned to those who are in need of good news.

When you and I receive good news, the very first thing we want to do is to share that news with someone we know and love. When a new child is born to a family, there are joyous announcements and long distance phone calls. The news of promotion at work is soon shared with family and friends far and near.

It has been over 2000 years since the greatest interruption ever, the greatest news in history came to earth. To this day, the news of God's intervention into this world through a child born in a stable remains the greatest news of all time. It is news that must be shared.

News that must be celebrated:

When good news is shared, the immediate response is *joy* and *celebration*. Can you recall the moment that first child was born? Remember the time the doctor told you everything was going to be okay?

Good news gives birth to great *rejoicing* and *celebration*. Even the child in Elizabeth's womb "*jumps for joy*" when Mary came with her great news. Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit and then Mary begins the famous, "*My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour!*"

The joy that *sparkles* in the story of the relationship between Mary and Elizabeth is a joy that comes only to those who are engaged in the life of faith. It is the joy of obedience that leads to celebration.

Mary's journey began in earnest when she embraced the promise of God as brought to her by Gabriel, "*...nothing will be impossible with God.*" Mary's response was the key to joy, "*Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.*"

God had come with blessing - first to Elizabeth and then to Mary - and the whole world would be blessed by the results. Mary breaks into song and behind the words of a young peasant girl from long ago lies the world's greatest announcement of justice and liberty.

- **News that must be lived**

In the beautiful words the Christian world has come to know as "*The Magnificat*" the humble, unassuming young woman from Nazareth praises God for her blessing and utters the most radical words. What song is it in your heart?

Through her, the Holy Spirit speaks of how God's divine plan is to bring down the mighty and lift up the lowly - to feed the hungry poor and turn away the rich! "*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.*" [1:51-53]

As well as news that must be *shared* and *celebrated*, this is news that must be *lived*. When God comes with blessing, there is a specific promise that wrong will be made right and injustice will give way to justice. The poor and dispossessed will be filled the powers of those who are filled will be scattered.

As we celebrate this wonderful joyous day, our hearts are drawn to the day God came with blessing through a gentle mother and tender child in a tiny village across the oceans. And in the words that are "*joy to the world*," there is a promise to all who have been "*left out*."

It is my prayer in this season that our hearts will also be drawn to give something to our Lord who has need of our joyful obedience. The good news is to *live* as well as news to *celebrate*.

There are so many in our world who are not included in the blessings we enjoy. Mary's revolutionary words are that - just at the time we find ourself wrapped up in family and friends and the blessing we enjoy - we hear a call to look at others with the eyes of God. And when we look, we see so many who long for the time when God will exalt the lowly and fill the hungry with good things.

Mary said, "*God has filled the hungry with good things and he has sent the rich empty away*." In this world people amass wealth. Some gather things and resources they don't need but simply want.

The end result is that some lack the things they need. Some live in homes with more rooms that they can use, with more clothes than they can wear, and more food than they can eat while others starve naked in the streets.

In short Jesus came to be the Good News that would drastically transform the world and people's lives. He came to bring joy out of sadness. He came to bring righteousness out of sin. He came to bring down the powerful and lift up the humble. He came to feed the hungry and send the selfish rich empty away.

This is pretty "*hard news*" to hear on Christmas Eve - yet it is news that is intimately intertwined with the "*good news*" - the good news of God is news that is "Joy to the World" - all of the world.

And if Jesus has changed your life, and transformed your weeping to gladness and your sin to righteousness, then join *the Magnificat*. Join the battle against economic injustice. Make undermining the powers of pride, prejudice and materialism your quest. That is what Mary was expecting! And that is what all Christian should be expecting in their lives and in the world at large!

These women Mary and Elizabeth come together and speak to us, to awaken us from the haze of frantic preparations for a celebration that is increasingly more earth-bound than spiritual. In their greetings to each other we discover the unexpectedness of this moment of hope, the message of embracing the twists and turns, ups and downs of life, and recognizing that God is present at *all* times.

We are not alone in the darkest of times or in the happiest. In days of worry, anger, fear, grief, or any other part of life that is unsettling, let us find our inner faith made stronger in knowing that the One of Peace who is coming, is already here to peace us all together as his own. Jesus, comes as the face of God to sanctify and save us. Stop, sit, breathe in the peace of the quiet.

Christ is always in CHRISTmas...let's remember to keep Christ in Mondays, Thursdays, in February, and August. Let us truly *Sing to the Lord and bless his name and proclaim the good news of his salvation from day to day* to ourselves first!

What a wonderful Christmas gift it would be for Jesus Christ if his people would rise up and join him in, "*...exalting the lowly,*" and "*...filling the hungry with good things.*"

Then we will discover the perfect obedience that leads to perfect happiness. *Then* many who have been left out will come to know the *God who comes with blessing*. *Then* we will join Mary in her song,... "***My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour...***" Amen.