

WELCOME 18th December 2022 – 4th Sunday in Advent '22 A

Luke 1:39-55

Welcome! It's great to be together again today! **Bible Study Qs** are there to equip you so God can lead you deeper into His word/work in your life, & so you can share that w/ someone else. We also use them for our **Zoom Bible Study Catch-ups** on Friday @ 1p.m. Which will resume THIS Friday!

As we move into this week... This week I stumbled across the old bit of dark wisdom: "No one dies wishing they'd spent more time at work." It's true. The vast majority of us live hoping our lives count for more than just the number of barrels of oil we produced, head of cattle we sent to the abattoir, tons of wheat we shipped to market, number of students we taught or sermons we wrote. We want our life & our existence to be more than our circumstances marked off on some scorecard bank balance or record book. We want our lives to have value/meaning that last. We want to live in some way that really matters to someone other than our spouse or our kids Today...in Elizabeth & Mary we meet 2 women who had been told their lives would always be measured against a cultural/societal tote board & they'd always be found wanting. But both find themselves favoured by God for God's purposes not because of **their** greatness but because of the great promise God will fulfill **through** them.

AND we discover **we too** are favoured by God for God's purposes because of the great promise he has **already** fulfilled in Jesus...and like Mary & Elizabeth we bear the joy of that fulfilled promise to the world.

"Oh, how my soul praises the Lord. How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!"
We are part of that praise & joy!

"You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what he said."

We'll experience & trust that together today...

and we'll listen as we pray & light the 4th candle on the Advent Wreath.

Let's pray...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

*Heavenly Father, when our spirits despair & we deny our blessedness; forgive us.
When we ignore the mighty things you have done or doubt your mercy; reclaim us
When our hearts become proud & our esteem rests on despising others; humble us
When our wealth becomes our security & our safety becomes our hope; draw us
again to you.*

Come Lord Jesus! We turn to you, in readiness for all things to be made new!

Someone light the Advent Wreath

*O come dear child of Ma-ry come,
God's Word made flesh within our earthly home;
Love stir within the wo-omb of night,
Love put fear and evil all to flight.
Rejoice, rejoice! Take heart and do not fear,
God's chosen one, Immanuel, draws near.*

Let it be in us according to your eternal promise in Jesus... Amen.

Let's hear God's word...

FAITH CHAT:

1. What about Christmas brings you joy? *Anything?*
2. Who brings joy to your journey when circumstances are confusing or difficult?

Prayer after the sermon:

"Heavenly Father, your kindness caused the light of Christ to shine among us. Extend your mercy now we pray to all the people we meet this week who do not have joy in Christ. Let your saving love be made known to them that all hearts would turn to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

4th Sunday in Advent '22 A – EXPERIENCE CHRISTMAS: FEEL THE JOY

It's been suggested the average person **has** about 10,000 separate thoughts/day? Each of those thoughts represents a choice, a decision to think about this, not that; focus here not there. Ralph Waldo Emerson **said**, Beware of what you set your mind on because that you surely will become. *Whatever has your attention has you.*

Elizabeth had been told for the bulk of her adult life that she was faulty...not enough broken immeasurably...The words of her day were "barren" "childless" & for that she was "ashamed" "disgraced". No matter how much Zechariah loved her/she loved him; she was always spoken of in whispered pitying tones & always something of a family embarrassment. I know folks who live under just such a cloud...genuinely feel as if the world is happiest when they're not out in it...out of sight out of mind.

Mary's what? 14/15 yrs old. She comes from that **backwater** hometown in Israel people made fun of (Naz not Jerusalem). She's from an **insignificant** family. Out of sight & out of mind was how she was meant to exist until her wedding day. But now even blind Freddy "knows" what's what. Her ticket to a better life is her engagement to the carpenter Joseph & that's looking shaky. Her whole existence is up for grabs... Her family could have her **stoned** to death just on suspicion of **adultery** - being an **unwed** pregnant teenaged **girl**. She has every reason to be frightened. She's been told her whole life that "marrying up" & raising a family is all she's good for...and now... Imagine your life like theirs shaped by the drumbeat of "**not** enough." Whatever has your attention has you.

I think that's pretty common...I am amazed at how many post-modern folks cling to a worldview that offers them literally nothing...says life comes from/goes to nothing! In today's world a very pervasive attitude to human existence is that we emerge or evolve from random nothingness (cosmic collisions, big bangs & prehistoric ooze) & hurtle toward an equally random emptiness where utter extinction greets us when we draw our last breath. Hopelessness pointlessness joylessness except what we can scratch out of our meagre existence here is the sum total of life. Any wonder we see all around us loneliness victimhood alienation despair depression & rabid attacks on whoever refuses to submit to the latest fad fashion or folly.

Remember... Whatever has your attention has you. Imagine your life like so many shaped by the drumbeat of "not enough" or from nothing moving toward nothing. But then listen to Elizabeth & Mary.

At the sound of Mary's greeting, Elizabeth's child leaped within her & she was filled with the Holy Spirit. Elizabeth gave a glad cry & exclaimed to Mary, "God has blessed you above all women, & your child is blessed. Why am I so honoured, that the mother of my Lord should

visit me? When I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy. You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what he said."

Mary responded, "Oh, how my soul praises the Lord. How my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour! For he took notice of his lowly servant girl, & from now on all generations will call me blessed. For the Mighty One is holy, & he has done great things for me. He shows mercy from generation to generation to all who fear him. His mighty arm has done tremendous things! He has scattered the proud & haughty ones. He has brought down princes from their thrones & exalted the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things & sent the rich away with empty hands. He has helped his servant Israel & remembered to be merciful. For he made this promise to our ancestors, to Abraham & his children forever."

1st - Look how Elizabeth greets Mary...You are blessed because you have God's Son in your womb? No. You are blessed because you've got a special mission in life? No. You are blessed because you're going to be famous forever? No "You are blessed because you believed God would do what he said." You are blessed because you abandoned the incessant drumbeat of not enough of fear of shame of social stigma for the eternal trajectory of God's plan to rescue & redeem & have thrown yourself fully into God's hands...come what may. You gave up mindset of despair for one of joy...You trusted God was bigger than the all-swallowing chasm of nothing the world offered. Feel the Joy?

Joy is the whole of your being responding to God's gracious embrace...Joy erupts when we trust God's word for us & this world...Joy comes from the promises of God for a restored creation & renewed lives & regenerated future & we allow our lives to be spent for that future. Elizabeth declares You are blessed because you trusted God was bigger than the all-swallowing chasm of nothing the world offered.

2nd – Now Mary...**My soul praises the Lord**...She acknowledges God as bigger, stronger, more powerful than & sovereign over all of her fears & worries...As she looks at her life/future - what she says is, "God is sovereign/rules over all...If he can make the impossible happen in my womb, he can handle all the rest...I trust him"
God who has absorbed her life into his plans for all humanity is greater & grander than anything the world decides or declares. That's true for Elizabeth Mary you & me. :|| Joy erupts when we trust God's word for us & this world.

But she doesn't stop...**My spirit rejoices in God my Savior!**...She had been told to name the child growing ^{w/in} her "Jesus." *You will conceive & give birth to a son, & you will name him Jesus.* His very name means "God saves" & she welcomes with open arms & an open heart the promise/assurance that God in this Son will draw his lost creation back to himself in love **AND** that she is part of that saving goodness.

Whether she fully understands or not Mary praises God that He has not abandoned her or this world to nothingness, but is coming in an overflow of saving love, redeeming grace & steadfast faithful compassion.

Joy is the whole of your being responding to God's gracious embrace...Joy erupts when we trust God's word for us & this world...Joy comes from the promises of God for a restored creation & renewed lives & regenerated future & we allow our lives to be spent for that future. Joy is the outward manifestation of an internal certainty & assurance that demonstrates soul-deep abiding confidence in God's presence, power sovereignty & purpose at work in all things & leans in with anticipation for what God will do next. Joy expects God's grace/goodness/abundant blessing just up ahead & rushes to live in that abundance.

For he took notice of his lowly servant girl, & from now on all generations will call me blessed...It is easy to feel forgotten...overlooked & unnoticed in this life...I did it by accident @ the carols last week...wanted to say "Hi" to someone & walked right past someone else...not because that person's unimportant but because I just didn't see 'em... Mary says, "God doesn't do that. God never just walks past because he has other stuff on his mind. God sees. God's acknowledges. He speaks...loves...knows. God knows every hair on your head & every longing of your heart & every day of your life. God knows it all. And...he pays attention. He's a Father attentive in detail to all of his sons & daughters. That's what she says. God knows...God cares God loves...me/you. If you trust that, you'll sleep better tonight. If you start each day with that...with that song on your lips & that assurance in your heart...the devil will run just seeing you get out of bed in the morning.

Never forget...you are precious & beloved of the Father. He sent Jesus to live die & rise again so that you could live in His presence always. When you live purposely from that foundation...live intentionally from that good news; Jesus pulls you up from the muck & mire of this broken world. He pulls you up from bitterness, up from futility, up from resentment, up from anger, compromise, fear, dishonesty, greed, selfishness, pessimism, victimhood & despair...and into joy...into hope...into love...life...freedom...into peace...into patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, & self-control.

From now on all generations will call me blessed...not right away they won't. At one point Jesus' enemies say, "We are children of Abraham...but we don't know where you come from." Which is code for "We think your mom was a tramp." That baby bump would cause every tongue in town to flap. But Mary knows that in the midst of everything God is enlarging her dignity, declaring her worth, restoring her nobility: *See how very much our Father loves us, for he calls us his children, & that is what we are!*

The people who belong to this world don't recognize that we are God's children because they don't know him. Mary trusts God to restore to her in abundance everything the world will take from her... From now on all generations will call me blessed. Whatever the world has taken...trust God to restore it... somehow, someway...

For the Mighty One is holy, & he has done great things for me...Quickly...Mary suddenly finds herself living deep in the promises of God. She sees she is in the very heart of God's plan from forever to bring home all those he created for his joy & love. Mary/Elizabeth discover they are now agents of God's justice & righteousness which he pours out over the whole creation. The English translations here don't get it completely right: All Mary's verbs are past tense...as in "done & dusted." The best the English can do is perfect tense...a past action with future consequences...but Mary sings w/ joy of a work fully accomplished...as if the curtain of heaven was pulled back & she saw the world changed & radiant w/ the grandeur & glory of God. like Revelation

Php 3:20-21 - *But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior. He will take our weak mortal bodies & change them into glorious bodies like his own...* God has pointed our lives in the direction of ultimate joy...from weak/mortal to glory like his. So we live toward & for that joy. We lean into that promise. We stretch for it & keep our hearts focused on Jesus Christ who destroyed death/sin/evil & gives us his victory because we know the day is coming when this weakness this frail fragile decaying dying flesh will to be transformed into an eternal unbreakable replica of the original one-&-only Son of God. We will experience the resurrection in all its glorious power & fullness & joy will overwhelm all we are.

Until then...We spend our lives spent for that future as agents of joy freedom, hope, restoration...bearers of the good news that now is not the time to hide from the world but to lift up our heads to see all God is doing...to declare that God's work will not rest until his glory, righteousness, justice, love & joy is manifest on earth as it is in heaven...in every heart – in every life – in every circumstance of this world. **We too** are favoured by God for God's purposes because of the great promise he has already fulfilled in Jesus...and like Mary & Elizabeth we bear the joy of that fulfilled promise to the world.

TAKE IT HOME – (2 QUESTIONS THIS WEEK)

In what part of your life do you need to believe God's promise to you so you experience joy?

To whom do you need to speak God's promise so they do?

Let's pray...