

“Mary’s Joyful Song and Ours”

Luke 1:39-56

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Steven had a bad habit of exaggerating. His mother tried everything to get him to stop. Nothing worked. One day he came home from school an hour late. When she asked him why he was late, he told her that after school he stopped at the lake to fish. She asked him, “Did you catch any fish?” “Yes, about fifty,” he answered. “Where are they?” she asked. “Well,” he said, “some people were sitting on their porch and they were hungry, so I gave the fish to them.” The mother exploded. “You have to stop this! I’ve had it! We’re going to talk to the pastor about this!” They went to the pastor’s office and the mother explained the situation to the minister while the boy waited outside. The pastor said, “I have an idea. I’ll show him just how ridiculous it sounds to exaggerate.” The pastor sat the boy down and said, “I want to tell you a story. After the service last Sunday I was at the altar, when suddenly I heard a strange sound. When I turned around to look, I saw a five hundred pound grizzly bear walking down the aisle toward me. He came right up to me and started choking the very life out of me. I would have been a goner, but just then, from the side door came a five pound Chihuahua. He ran up and grabbed the bear. Then he dragged the bear outside, dug a big hole, threw the bear into it, and then sat down next to the hole wagging his tail.” “Now, Steven, do you believe that story?” “Yes sir,” Steven said. “That was my dog!”

(Steven was a magnifier!) In our Scripture reading, we can see Mary as a magnifier, but obviously she is a quite different kind of magnifier! When she was told that she would be pregnant and bear a child, she was confused and terrified. But now, she is ready to praise the Lord. What happened to her? This Mary’s song is well known as “The *Magnificat* (in Latin, “My soul magnifies the Lord” or “Song of Mary.” Her song is filled with joy, gratitude and rejoicing God’s work for her. Do you think that Mary exaggerated her feelings like Steven in a joke or she was able to sing a joyful song out of her deep trusting that God works for her? This morning, I want to invite you to journey with Mary to see what helped her to praise the Lord even in the circumstances of dangers, risks and uncertain future.

Mary was still a teenager girl, yet unmarried and economically she grew up in a poor family in Nazareth. Not only do we know about her personal circumstance, but women also at Jesus’ time had very little status in that society. In the time of Jesus, women couldn’t go out in public or talk to strangers, they

couldn't testify in court trials. When they were outside of their homes, they had to wear not one but two veils. According to Jewish practice, they "had access to the holy" only through the men in their lives. Metzger and Coogan say, "They had become second-class Jews, excluded from the worship and teaching of God, with status scarcely above that of slaves" (The Oxford Companion to the Bible) Who will believe that Mary will give a birth to the Messiah? No one can imagine the Messiah's coming through the teenager girl's body. This is a totally nonsense! But, Mary was placed in dangers and life threatening situation because the Angel Gabriel delivered God's plan for her. Obviously, she must be confused, terrified and worried about what would happen soon? She needed a help and someone she could talk about what she had heard and had happened to her. Right away, Elizabeth came up her mind as the first person to share her story. Our Scripture reports that as soon as Mary learned she was pregnant, she "went with haste" to visit Elizabeth.

Speaking of Elizabeth, she was an older lady who was married to the retired priest, named Zechariah and they lived in Ein Karem. Elizabeth must be either an older cousin or even an aunt or great aunt to Mary. Elizabeth and her husband couldn't have children so they treated her nieces and nephews as if they were their own. Perhaps this is why Mary felt drawn to Elizabeth: Elizabeth maybe had been like a mother to Mary in days past. Mary wanted to see Elizabeth in the hope that she would believe her and help her. Elizabeth was her best mentor and guide among her close relatives. She was also a source of encouragement, wisdom and perspective. Elizabeth's house was located in Ein Karen, a village on a hill a few miles (less than an hour's walk) from the capital Jerusalem but it was located over eighty miles away from Nazareth, Mary's house. If Mary would travel down to Mary's house by foot, it would have taken perhaps nine days along mountain rages to Ein Karem. The fact that Mary was willing to travel nine days across three mountains to see Elizabeth talk about how she was feeling. She longed for someone who might believe her and who could help her make sure of what was happening.

What happened to Mary when she met Elizabeth at her house? In our Scripture reading, Elizabeth used the word *blessed* three times to describe Mary and the child she would have: "You are blessed among all women and your child is blessed. Mary, don't you see it? You are really blessed!" Elizabeth affirmed her that she was chosen, blessed and accepted by God. Sometimes, we think God's blessing involves gaining money, power, and prestige, Blessedness is often associated with a life of comfort and ease. When we describe our blessings, they often include our homes, our jobs, our health and wealth. But Mary's blessedness wasn't material. Mary's blessedness came from being a part of God's plan-to be used by God for God's plan. Her blessedness was in the fact

that she was chosen by God to bear the Messiah. What a great encouragement and support to a young, poor teenager who were fearful about what happened to her.

Here is another significant point that we should remember. All of us need a person like Elizabeth in our life journey, a person who understands, who can guide us encourage and affirm us. In the similar way, we need to be a person, like Elizabeth for a younger person as a mentor or supporter who will encourage younger people. Your warm words and kind attitude can influence someone's life and even it can change that person's life. After Mary received feelings of being accepted and blessed by Elizabeth, she must have confidence in God's plan for her. Elizabeth affirmed her that God is with her. Now, Mary was ready to take any risk, because she knew that God would be with her.

Mary was bold to sing a joyful song and praise the Lord even in the circumstances of dangers and fears, because she had joy in her deeper heart. Joy doesn't come from circumstances, but Mary despite dangers, and fears, "Magnified the Lord and rejoiced in God." Joy comes from attitude that I look at my current situation through the eyes of faith, trusting that God is at work and that he will be always with us. Paul Tillich defines "The Meaning of Joy" in his sermon collection, "The New Being" in this way: **"For the men of the Old and New Testaments the lack of joy is a consequence of man's separation from God, and the presence of joy is a consequence of the reunion with God."** I believe that Church should be a commissioned community for sharing this joy and caring for people. We need to remind people and the world that God is with you. What a powerful message for us! Mary was able to rejoice in the Lord even in the midst of uncertain, fearful and terrifying life circumstances. Our new Messiah is brining a gift of joy to each of us in this beautiful Advent season. I hope and pray that we can receive this gift as ours awaiting the Messiah's arrival. Amen