



Saint John United Methodist Church
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Message for December 5, 2021
“Images of Christmas: A Mother’s Prayer”
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb
Scripture: Luke 1:46-56

The Gift That Doesn’t Disappoint

With supply chain issues threatening everyone’s gift buying this Christmas, we have been encouraged to get out early and complete our shopping. I love the story of the couple who got out early to do their shopping. They slipped off to a nearby city and while there got separated from one another. The wife was the first to use her cell phone.

“Honey, where in the world are you?” she asked.

To which the husband replied, *“Remember when we were first married the jewelry shop where you saw that diamond necklace you loved? But we didn’t have enough money at the time, so I said, ‘Someday I’ll come back to this shop and buy that necklace for you.’ Do you remember that?”*

“Oh yes,” she shouted.

“Well, I’m at the Home Depot right next door getting some supplies.”

I hate to admit it, but that’s something I would do. I am not Mr. Romance for nothing.

We all know from experience that this can be a season fraught with disappointment. The gifts we receive might not always be to our liking. That’s why here on Sunday mornings we’ll be keeping our focus right where it needs to be—upon the gift that is Christ’s birth, a gift that doesn’t disappoint.

Mary and Her Trip to See Elizabeth

As we talked last week all of this started with the angel, Gabriel visiting Mary with the great news that she would give birth to God’s Son. That was weighty news for a young, unwed teenager. Mary’s faith though would see her through.

Everybody deals with weighty news in different ways.

- Some freak out, while others make every effort to stay calm.
- Some try to forget, while others embrace what’s going on.
- Some isolate themselves, while seek the support of family and friends.

The latter is what Mary did. She sought the support of family. She took the long trek from her hometown of Nazareth to the hill country of Judea to the home of her relative Elizabeth. Elizabeth was also pregnant. She was overjoyed to see Mary, and so was her baby. He leapt in her womb upon Mary’s arrival. *“Blessed are you among women and blessed is the child you will bear!”* (Luke 1:42)

Elizabeth knew that something special was about to take place. The Holy Spirit was moving in a very special way.

Mary's Deep Faith

As we said a second ago, Mary's faith was the very thing that that would see her through. Her faith was more than evident to Elizabeth to the place that Elizabeth commended her on it. *"Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!"* (Luke 1:45)

In a word, Mary believed. As improbable as the events surrounding her life were, Mary believed, and it was that faith that led her to pray. Some say she even began to sing.

I love this quote from Lori Wagner, *"Music always begins with a wail in the heart, becomes a prayer, then a praise, and contains elements of all three."*

Let's here then Mary's prayer as she seeks to *"glorify"* God. We read today, Luke 1:46-55.

Luke 1:46-55

*And Mary said:
"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,
for 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,
just as he promised our ancestors."*

A Prayer of Praise

Sometimes circumstances are such that all we can do is pray. That's the way it was for Mary, God's humble servant. Mary's every desire was to express herself before God, and that expression took the form of praise. She *"glorified"* God for what he was doing, which took a great deal of faith. Things were so uncertain, and yet Mary praised the Lord. Now that's faith. How is that sort of thing playing out in your life?

Upon celebrating Thanksgiving just, a couple of weeks ago, we became keenly aware, yet again, about how giving thanks awakens us to the great things God is doing. I encourage you to *"give thanks"* to God, even if you don't feel like it. Not only will you find your spirits lifted, but your focus will be right where it needs to be—upon God and his good work in your life.

The “glory” Mary gave God not only encouraged her, but kept her sights set upon the very One who was providing for her life. Go ahead and give thanksgiving a try. It has worked wonders for my life. I know it will for yours.

A Song of Humility

The prayer we read today from Luke 1:46-55 is not just a prayer of praise, but a prayer of humility. “*My soul glorifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior for he has been mindful of his humble servant.*” (Luke 1:46-48)

Without a doubt the emphasis of Mary’s prayer was upon God and what he was doing in her life, and there is little doubt that she was thankful for that. Mary’s prayer also emphasized the fact that she was of low estate. Mary was God’s humble servant, which made it possible for God to do marvelous things.

Humility is always fertile soil field for God to do his thing. There is power in humility because of what God is able to do when we humble ourselves before him. Instead of our way, God’s way becomes the way of our lives. We find ourselves receptive to God’s love, open to his grace, and better prepared to follow his leadership.

Jesus talked a great deal about humility, but no more pointedly than in the Beatitudes. “*Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.*” (Matthew 5:3) This is in contrast to those who are spiritually proud and self-sufficient.

“*Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.*” (Matthew 5:5) This is a disposition that allows God to do with us what he will and because of that we are blessed.

Mary knew about those blessings. Despite the hardship and uncertainty, she endured, Mary experienced the blessings of God. “*From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me.*” (Luke 1:48-49) In her humility, Mary was able to recognize that what God was doing was not only best for her, but for the generations that would follow her.

God’s Dealings with the Proud

In contrast, Mary went onto pray about how God deals with those who are proud. She prayed about how God brings down the mighty. Pride always gets in the way of what God ultimately wants accomplished. We would do well to hear that and take it to heart.

In an age where pride and position seem to rule the day, humility remains God’s way. God is all about working with those who are humble. And for those who are proud God’s every desire is to see that they are.

I know for a fact that God is at work to keep me humble because a humble heart is the very place where God can do his best work.

What Sort of Prayers Are You Praying?

What sort of prayers are you praying this Christmas?

It sure is easy to get down. The pressures of this season are enough to get even the most faithful down. Let’s take our cue from Mary and stay at our prayers. They are the very things that will keep us connected to God and what he is trying to do in our lives.