

Luke 1:39-55
Fourth Sunday in Advent
December 19, 2021

What a joy it was to hear our children praise our Lord with singing and instruments and readings! It likely brings back memories of childhood for many of us and Christmas services we took part in. But Christmas isn't just for kids, despite the saying often heard. It's for big people, too, or else it brings out the kid in us. It is a time for celebration.

Mary had something astounding to celebrate, even if it was also a major challenge to try to explain to her family and community and most of all, to Joseph. Today's text contains a song we join with her in proclaiming

WE GLORIFY THE LORD

- I. For his miraculous acts
- II. For his merciful goodness
- III. For his mighty faithfulness

Miraculous acts abound at the outset of the text. There were the upcoming births. The angel Gabriel had just told Mary that she would become the mother of Jesus. The miracle of the virgin birth would occur. That doesn't happen in human experience. But it would! And there was more. The baby she would bear would be God's Son. The fullness of the deity would dwell in him in bodily form. That's impossible, our minds scream. But not with God. All things are possible with him, the angel had asserted.

Gabriel had pointed to Elizabeth as evidence. She was past the age of childbearing, but was also expecting a child. Her son would be special: the forerunner of the Messiah. We know him as John the Baptist. Mary's relative Elizabeth was in her sixth month of pregnancy. Soon after the angel had appeared to Mary, she headed off to see Elizabeth. She needed someone to talk to. Consider her situation. How would people react when they found out she was having a baby? What about Joseph, her betrothed one who knew he was not the father? Zechariah and Elizabeth lived in one of the towns in Judah established for priests, likely near Jerusalem. Mary was from Nazareth, in Galilee. She made that trip of about eighty miles. By going there she was not checking up on God, to see if Elizabeth really was expecting a baby. She went to share her joy with someone who would understand.

Then occurred another miraculous act involving revealed knowledge. Mary thought she had astounding news to share, but was herself astounded as she arrived at her destination. "In a loud voice she (Elizabeth) exclaimed, '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?” She knew! Mary was not yet visibly pregnant. God had made the situation known to Elizabeth and fully: who the child would be and his identity as the Lord.

The truth was also known by another which really causes us to marvel. Elizabeth continued, “As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.” Although still unborn, John knew and believed in the recently conceived child as his Savior. How was it possible? It was a miracle, as it is with anyone who is brought to faith. It doesn’t take powers of reason (human reason can actually get in the way of faith). Neither does reaching a certain age or educational level make a difference. God’s angel had told Zechariah that John would be filled with the Spirit from the womb.

This all had to have an effect on Mary. It affirmed her faith and increased her joy. At first she must have wondered whether anyone would believe her. Elizabeth did and God was taking care of everything. Mary was truly blessed in believing God’s message.

So are we. It is both foolish and worthy of condemnation to reject what God tells us. The blessing of faith is that we receive the salvation Mary’s baby was coming to bring. God works the miracle of faith through the gospel message. That’s why we proclaim it openly and loudly and hurry to share the news. For us, it has been accomplished. We don’t have to wait even a few months. The Savior has come!

II.

Mary responded with words of praise to God. We use them still. It is called the “Song of Mary” or “Magnificat” from its Latin beginning and is part of our service of Evening Praise, which we used during our midweek Advent services. In it we join Mary in glorifying God for his merciful goodness. He was certainly good to Mary. She would have a unique privilege. She was the only woman in history who would give birth to God’s Son. Appropriately she might ask, “Why me?” She had a humble background. Some think she had no mother living, since she went to see Elizabeth. Her territory of Galilee was not respected. Many women were higher in society. There must have been a daughter of the high priest or of a member of the Sanhedrin who would have been a more likely candidate for the role.

Her position would change drastically. “From now on all generations will call me blessed.” Every Jewish lady desired the privilege to be the one to bear the Messiah. Mary had that blessing. Some people get carried away and credit Mary with deserving the honor in some way. She was not deluded. She clearly credited God: “For the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name.” She

recognized that she was a sinner and rejoiced “in God my Savior.” Yes, Mary’s Son was also her Savior and Lord.

God’s merciful goodness was not limited to Mary. Jesus was the Savior of the world. He was coming to carry out the plan God had made in eternity. He acted in mercy, in his love for those suffering in the misery of sin and guilt. Mercy presupposes grace, God’s love for the undeserving.

The Lord’s mercy extends “from generation to generation,” one after another to this day. It was not limited to the people alive then. Jesus was so great that he sacrificed himself once for all, all people and all time.

Mary’s song noted God’s goodness “to those who fear him.” That is the fear of faith. It is a respectful regard for God that is shown in worship and obedience. We wouldn’t think of going against him who has provided forgiveness for all sins, lasting peace with God, guidance for our daily lives, and the promise of eternal life. He has shown merciful goodness.

He has shown it to us. You and I are included. We were brought by the Holy Spirit to know Jesus as our Savior. We receive the benefits of the one Mary bore. We rejoice and glorify him. That’s why Christmas is a happy time. We reflect and acknowledge God’s merciful goodness. Join Mary in praising God.

III.

The Lord’s goodness was not limited to the birth of Jesus. It is constant, so we also glorify him for his mighty faithfulness. He has performed many mighty acts. Several involved bringing down the proud. We can think of the Pharaoh of Egypt during the time of Moses. The downfall of Nebuchadnezzar is another that comes to mind. He was the proud king of Babylon who conquered Judah. He was the one who sent Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego into the fiery furnace when they refused to bow down to his great statue. Later on he had a dream, interpreted by Daniel, that came true. “He was driven away from people and ate grass like cattle. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird.” How the mighty had fallen! There are still people, ourselves included at times, who elevate themselves and their opinions over God. It happens whenever we reject his ways and pick our own. But God has a knack for bursting the bubble of the self-righteous and arrogant. We may applaud when that happens. We’re happy to see them get their due. As we are gloating, think about it: are we any different? Look out!

Mary noted that God also brings up the humble. King Nebuchadnezzar was restored to sanity and his position when he acknowledged the greatness of God.

Think of the anointing of David. Although his family hadn't considered him worth inviting in from the field when the prophet Samuel came to anoint one of the sons of Jesse as the next king of Israel, he was the Lord's choice. And we think today of Mary's privilege.

Her song of praise continued, "He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty." He supplies all our needs. On the other hand, those rich people who trust in their wealth find the fortune they pile up to be hollow and not satisfying. They get nothing more than their earthly items.

These verses also reflect a spiritual truth. God cuts down the self-righteous with his law but forgives the humble, penitent sinner. He satisfies those hungering and thirsting for righteousness, recognizing their own lack of it, while those admired for their piety and thinking they are OK get nothing more than that recognition of the world.

In his actions God was faithful to his promises to the nation of Israel. He showered goodness upon them throughout their history. He formed them as a nation, multiplied their population, took them to the Promised Land and gave them possession of it. He protected them from enemies. He sent them his prophets to warn against sin and to point to the coming Savior. Most of all he sent his Son through their nation. All of this goodness was as he had promised their forefathers and had prophesied throughout history. He kept his Word.

He shows similar faithfulness to us as the spiritual Israel, the "faith descendants" of Abraham. He makes us wonderful promises of provision, care, protection and above all, eternal life. Not a one will fail. Take comfort in that fact as you review God's faithfulness in this Christmas season.

As we think of his dealings with Israel we also receive a warning. When so many from God's nation rejected Mary's child, they forfeited their favored position. Don't let that happen to you. Keep receiving God's promises in faith, trust Jesus as your Savior, and glorify him eternally. That's what God wants for you. He will remain faithful.

God has been faithful in his merciful goodness and in his miraculous acts for you. He deserves your praises. Offer them freely this season and always.