

## Advent 4 Luke 1, 39-56 Micah 5, 2-5 22<sup>nd</sup> Dec 2024

**Prayer:** Lord, may we rejoice in the gift of your word and of your son Jesus Christ as we reflect on the news of your Kingdom come into the world. Amen.

Does your soul magnify the Lord? Does your spirit rejoice in God your Saviour?

Are you filled with the joy of God's blessings and gifts – so much that you must burst into song like Mary?

So much joy and expectation in Mary's song!

Why did Mary burst forth in song? She knew the joy of the Lord. Her song was in response to her cousin Elizabeth's proclamation that she was carrying the Messiah in her womb. It was confirmation that all that the Angel Gabriel (who had visited Mary), said was true. Mary had questioned "*how could this be*" when Gabriel said she would bear a son of the Most High but had responded with "*Let this be with me according to your word*". Now she knows that indeed this thing has taken place.

Gabriel had told her that her much older barren cousin Elizabeth was pregnant, as a sign that "nothing is impossible with God!". So, she had set off in haste to visit Elizabeth in the hill country.

Elizabeth only had to hear Mary's greeting and she was filled with the Holy Spirit, with knowledge of Mary's situation. Mary didn't have a chance to take her aside for a private conversation, to share with her details of the Angels visit.

No...we read that the baby in Elizabeth's womb leapt for joy on hearing Mary's greeting. And seeing her older cousin pregnant would have been confirmation enough for Mary that all was true. And instead of Mary deferring to her elder, as soon as she hears her greeting, Elizabeth cries out; *Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear. But why am I so favoured, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?...*

I love imagining this scene of these two women, chosen by God - one to bear John the Baptist to proclaim the coming King and the other to bear the King himself; being so excited as they greet one another. Dancing around, hugging and singing with great joy.

Mary sings out her praise, acknowledging her lowliness and need for a Saviour – *My soul glorifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.*

What a weird position to be in...carrying in her womb...her saviour and the Saviour of the world.

Why did God choose Mary and Elizabeth? Two ordinary women. One elderly and barren who would have been shamed for not producing a son for her husband, and the other a young virgin girl.

God brings grace and mercy to those who fear him, he lifts up the humble. He turns the ways of this world upside down. When Elizabeth discovered she was pregnant she declared that the Lord had taken away her disgrace when he looked favourably on her.

And she greets and welcomes her younger cousin and takes her into her home for 3 months. She knows that Mary's son is greater than the one in her womb and she believes in the Lord's promises just like Mary. Ordinarily Mary's pregnancy prior to marriage to Joseph would have brought family shame and ostracism, but instead Elizabeth declares that Mary is blessed and instead of shame Mary can sing that she will be remembered by all generations because of what the Lord has done for her. *Holy is his name*. She honours the Lord.

Her song goes on to declare that not only has he done great things for *her* but more importantly he shows mercy to all who fear him. She remembers his faithfulness, scattering the proud, bringing down the powerful, lifting up the lowly and filling the hungry.

Although speaking in past tense, she is also being prophetic as to the mercy that God is bringing – the birth of the Messiah. The promised one that she is carrying, according to his promises.

She and Elizabeth shared with many Jews the hopes and dreams for Israel that the Messiah was coming to rescue them. They would have soaked themselves in the writings of the psalms and the prophets. And now these promises were being fulfilled, in unexpected ways through unexpected people, in unexpected places.

The King of the universe, who created the heavens and the earth comes in the form of a vulnerable baby. Born not in a palace, not even in a city like mighty Jerusalem. The greatest leader is born in a stable, in the small village of Bethlehem.

We heard read from the book of the prophet Micah this morning...*But you O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.*

It was no co-incidence that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. This is where King David came from, the greatest King in Israel's history. But now God was sending an even greater King. The one from Ancient of Days, who had been around for all time and yet was now coming as a vulnerable new babe.

David was the youngest of his brothers and yet he was the one God instructed Samuel to anoint as King. Bethlehem lay in the shadow of Jerusalem, just one of the little clans of Judah and yet that is where King Jesus was to be born.

From this insignificant village, a young shepherd boy grows up to become the most beloved king in Israel's history. And a descendant of that king, also born in Bethlehem fulfils God's long-awaited promises of deliverance, not just for Israel but for the whole world.

Micah uses shepherd imagery as he declares that this ruler will come from Bethlehem...

*He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. A shepherd provided security for their sheep, leading them to good grass and water and protected them from predators like bears and lions. In John chapter 10 we read that Jesus spoke of himself as *the good shepherd who laid down his life for his sheep*. The Shepherd who gathered his sheep to himself, who knew them by name, who protected them from the evil one, who offered them eternal life.*

Micah says that this ruler from Bethlehem not only brings security but he is the one who *will be our peace*.

Jesus, the shepherd of the sheep, is also the Prince of Peace and the King of Kings.

No wonder Elizabeth and Mary were exuberant and so excited that this ruler was coming and how awestruck and humbled they were to be used as part of God's plan.

No wonder Mary burst in to song. Wouldn't you?

This Christmas come and rejoice in God your Saviour. Who was born, lived, died and rose again for us. Jesus who was and is and is to come. Jesus who is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the only one who can bring us true peace. Peace in our hearts.

He is the one we can fully put our trust in. For the rulers of this world, who are given worldly honour and privileges can be prone to abuse their power and be self-seeking (even King David succumbed to this). Jesus will return one day to bring down the proud and powerful from their thrones. And he will bring everlasting peace. He must weep when he sees the pain and suffering occurring in the place of his birth and surrounds in the middle east. We pray, come Lord Jesus, come.

Jesus is the good shepherd, the ruler born in a stable in lowly Bethlehem, of a young virgin Mary. God chooses the lowly, the humble to be his servants and to proclaim his name.

God chooses *you* to be his vessels. Will you be like Mary who responded with, *here am I the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your will.*

He won't ask you to bear his Son again, that was a once off! But Jesus has sent his Holy Spirit to live in us – we have Jesus living in us! and we are called to bear his image. To grow in Christlikeness and shine his light in the world. To continue to grow his kingdom and doing the things he did when he was on earth showing us how to live. Caring for the poor and needy...being generous as we put food in the basket for PICAL or the refugees, or donating to the many mission organisations who care for those suffering around the world.

We can pray for the sick, we can visit the lonely, we can tell others about the hope we have in Jesus. We can love as Jesus loves us, and when led by the Spirit we can tell others how much Jesus loves them. He loves so much that he came down at Christmas time to be born as one of us, and to die on a cross that we might have life.

May the Holy Spirit be upon you this Christmas, may you be overflowing with joy as you receive him, God's greatest gift, and I pray that you will join with Mary and the Angels worshipping him with a song in your heart – perhaps even bursting forth in verbal praise.

*Praise the Almighty God he's done great things for us. Holy is his name.*

Let's pray: Lord thank you for choosing us to be bearers of your good news, may we be obedient and joyous like Mary, being so filled with your love and goodness that we will exude a contagious joy that will reach others this Christmas, inviting them into a wonderful relationship with Jesus – our Lord and saviour. Amen.

Sit back and listen to a version of Mary's song with video of Mary and the journey from Gabriels visitation to the joy of the women meeting, to the birth of Jesus.

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=o\\_b-woAaK1s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o_b-woAaK1s)

Todd Agnew – Marys Song