

4<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY OF ADVENT

December 20, 2020

St. Luke 1:39-45:

## **“The Blessing of God’s Wisdom”**

- I. The Case of Mary and Elizabeth
- II. Drawn to the Word.
- III. Blessed Beyond this World's Wisdom.

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St. Luke 1:39-45

Dear friends in Christ,

The following is from a speech given by Sir Winston Churchill to Parliament during the time of World War II.

Which way can we turn to save our lives and the future of the world? It does not matter so much to old people. They are going soon away. But I find it poignant to look at youth in all its activity...and, most of all, to watch little children playing with their many games, and wonder what would lie before them if God wearied of mankind.

This is the fourth time I've quoted that in a sermon. Every time I read it, the harder it kicks. The post World War II generations have made great efforts to pursue what we sometimes call *the good life* - whatever that means. The overall effect on the church is stunning. Churchill's question, "What would lie before them (the children) if God wearied of mankind?" isn't something to wonder about. It's Scriptural reality. I would say that we're there. We must understand . . .

## THE BLESSING OF GOD'S WISDOM

### I. The Case of Mary and Elizabeth.

Our Gospel lesson for this Last Sunday of Advent begins with, "In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth." (vv. 39, 40)

Mary was a descendant of King David of the tribe of Judah. Elizabeth was a descendant of the High Priest Aaron of the tribe of Levi. Elizabeth's mother was probably from the tribe of Judah since Elizabeth and Mary were cousins. Mary was, of course, the mother of Jesus and Elizabeth the mother of the last of Old Testament Prophets, the man we know as John the Baptist. Now, there are a number of points to keep in mind.

First, God chose these two women to fill the position of mother. He chose Elizabeth to give birth to and nurture the great prophet who would prepare the way for our Lord and Savior. He chose Mary to give birth to and nurture our Jesus Who would prepare the way for everlasting life.

Second, both women would acknowledge their blessing. Elizabeth's words: "Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people." (Lk. 1:25) Mary's words from her song of praise, the Magnificat: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant." (Lk. 1:46,47)

Third, both women were of no importance to this world. They were of no social significance; women of wealth and power. In fact Mary and Joseph were poor as reported: "...when the time came for their purification..." they offered a sacrifice designated for the poor.

Fourth, as we know, both sons experienced acceptance and great rejection. They would be killed - murdered - for the truth of God's Word. We recall these words concerning John: "But Herod the tetrarch, who had been reproved by (John) for Herodias, his brother's wife, and for all the evil things that Herod had done, added this to them all, that he locked John in prison." (Lk. 3:19,20) Herod ultimately had John beheaded. And then, of course, it's impossible to ignore that last scene of Jesus on the Cross: "And all his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance watching these things." (Lk. 23:49) Mary was there.

Our text for this morning then reveals the miracle . . .

## II. Drawn to the Word.

And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit (you'll want to keep that in mind), and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord." (vv. 41-45)

It's a miracle. Mary carries the Lord Jesus, the Word made flesh, in her womb. Where the Word is so is the Holy Spirit. As a result, John leaps for joy. I am always reminded of David's words: "Yet you are he who took me from the womb; you made me trust you at my mother's breast; (faith was there in a new-born); On you I was cast from birth, and from my mother's womb you have been my God." (Ps. 22:9,10)

He does the same in baptism, most definitely including infant baptism, as Peter declared: "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ (the Word made flesh) for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (The One who works and sustains faith. Where the Word is, so is the Holy Spirit.). For the promise is for you and for your children (baptism for the children at that moment in time; children referring to babies on up) and for all who are far off...(the generations to come, including us)..." (Acts 2:38,39a)

Everything we've heard draws us to this Word of God: "Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God (that is, the Holy Spirit), that we might understand the things freely given us by God." (1 Cor. 2:12) And what has been given us from God is the wisdom of God, as Paul writes: "...Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God stronger than men." (1 Cor. 1:24b,25)

The power and wisdom of God are locked into these words: "...we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." (1 Cor. 1:23-24) And these words spell out the wisdom of God: "...by grace (God's undeserved love for sinners such as you and me!) you have been saved through faith (trust that Christ has paid for every sin and delivered us from hell). And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." (Eph. 2:8,9)

It is Zechariah - a priest - husband of Elizabeth and father of John - who clears the air, in spite of the fuzzy/fun Christianity that has been prevalent, deceiving and destructive. Zechariah clears the air in these words to his little son: "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins." (Lk. 1:75,77) *Forgiveness of sin*: that is the issue!

Why Christ has come into this world has absolutely nothing to do with taking away the bad to very bad moments of life! It's not about living the "good life" - whatever that means. It's about the forgiveness of sins. It's about "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son." It's about "whoever believes will...have eternal life."

## III. Blessed Beyond this World's Wisdom.

Dear Friends, this is where God was taking Mary and Elizabeth. Not to a life of luxury and ease; a life without trouble and sorrow. They would have plenty of that! God didn't take that away, but would see them through and give them strength to endure.

Back in August, in a discussion with a Pilgrim brother regarding the on-going events of the world and our country, the brother mentioned the sadness and dismay expressed by people he knew who claimed to be Christian but couldn't understand why God would allow what is happening to happen. We mutually agreed that they don't know Scripture, or they're not being taught Scripture, or they really don't want to know. And there's a lot of that: preferred ignorance. It's assumed that we're basically good and deserving. Our thoughts and hell driven slander, gossip and lying prove otherwise.

Mary and Elizabeth are great examples that God's people don't have it soft or easy. In fact, if you follow the history of God's people in the Old and New Testament Scriptures you can't miss the fact that they were in constant conflict with this world's wisdom - its thinking and ways.

And so, the Advent Season comes to its close. In a few days we'll once again greet another Christmas celebration. It's not about God making this a peaceful world. It's about walking through the valley of the shadow of death with Christ leading us to His Home. It's about having The Blessing of God's Wisdom. It's about the birth of God's Wisdom: Jesus. It's remembering that He will come again.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott