

4th Sunday in Advent

December 23, 2018

Our Savior's Way
Worshiping Sundays 8:00, 9:30, & 11:00 AM
Pastor Labuhn

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Today is the 4th Sunday of Advent and the day before Christmas Eve. Yes, TOMORROW is Christmas Eve and I hope that you're ready. Today seems to be a pivotal time. Those who have last minute things to take care of need to hurry and those who are ready anxiously look forward to tomorrow. Still, it's also a pivotal time in the church as well, because there's both a sense of anticipation and a sense of fulfillment at the same time.

So it's no wonder that in our Gospel reading for today, we hear about the time when Mary goes to visit her older relative Elizabeth. Both women were pregnant and were looking forward to the day when each would give birth to a son. Yes, even before Ultrasound technology, they knew that they were going to have sons because God sent the Angel Gabriel to share with them this Good News.

To be able to have and care for a child is a blessing given by God. But unfortunately, Elizabeth was someone who had lived her life unable to conceive and have a child. She quietly suffered as many women do who are unable to have children. But when she became pregnant, Elizabeth rejoiced with the likes of Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Hannah when she found out that she had become pregnant in her old age. She said, *"The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days, He has shown His favor and taken away my disgrace among the people."* (Luke 1:25)

This miraculous news of a woman in her old age getting pregnant must have been shared with many people at the time.

Even still, when Elizabeth was in her sixth month of pregnancy, Mary was told that she too had found favor with God. It seemed impossible to her, a young girl who was still a virgin could conceive and bear a child. She wasn't married yet. Would she feel disgraced for becoming pregnant? What would happen to her when people found out? How could this even be she asked? Gabriel told her that ***“The Holy Spirit would come upon her and the power of the Most High would overshadow her. So the Holy One to be born would be called the Son of God....For nothing is impossible with God.”*** (Luke 1:34-37)

Have you heard the story about Mrs. Nolan Cash who was published in Reader's Digest? She wrote in about the time when she was almost ready to give birth to her first child...“With the due date approaching for the birth of our first child, my husband was becoming increasingly fidgety. I had slight pains one evening but assured him, that they were not serious. I was in the den, relaxing when I heard him shaving. Then he started to get dressed as if he was going out. ‘What are you doing?’ I asked. ‘You can sit here if you want to,’ he replied, ‘but I'm going to the hospital!’”

So, after the angel left Mary, she quickly went to see the person who could best understand her situation the most, her relative Elizabeth. Mary entered the house and went to greet Elizabeth who was already in her sixth month. But when Elizabeth's baby heard Mary speak, the baby leaped in Elizabeth's womb, ***“and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.”*** While Mary couldn't yet have been showing, Elizabeth understood what had happened, because she said to Mary in a loud voice ***“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?”*** (Luke 1:41-43)

Elizabeth was blessed by that visit. She and her baby were blessed by Mary and her child. Mary was blessed among women to have been chosen by God, to do for His Son exactly what any good

mother would do for any of her children. To carry Him during gestation and take care of Him as a human being until that time when He could care for Himself. When we say, as Elizabeth did so long ago, that Mary is the mother of My Lord, we aren't saying anything uncommon about Mary, rather we're saying something miraculous about the baby that she carries. Jesus is who we celebrate and very soon, we will gather here again to celebrate His birth when He comes to us at Christmas. He is very God and very Man who comes for us.

Mary goes on to share, what the church often calls the Magnificent, as she pours out her heart in praise to God because He is mindful of those who live in humility, He shows mercy to those who fear Him, He scatters proud who take pride in themselves, and gives to those who are in need. This is also the song that we sing to Him in our own lives when we come in humility, repenting of our sins and in need of a Savior. And the Good News is that He is mindful of our humble state and takes away our disgrace. Through the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus, we are blessed to receive the forgiveness of our sins and new life in Him.

Today, we find ourselves at a pivotal time between the now of anticipation and not yet of fulfillment. We rejoice that Jesus came to us when He was born in that little town of Bethlehem so long ago, and yet, we look forward to the fulfillment of time when He will come again, to take us to be with Him and live with Him in Eternity. It's there where we will be united with our loved ones and rejoice with them forever. Until that day comes, by the power of the Holy Spirit, through His Word and Sacraments, He comes to abide in us so that we can rejoice in His blessings, live in that faith He has given to us, and share the joy that He comes to bring to us at Christmas.

In Jesus Name. Amen.