



Raquette Lake Chapel Sunday Blast December 12, 2021 -- 3 Advent

“Messengers”

The Angel Gabriel Visits Mary

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. "Greetings favored one! The Lord is with you. ... "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God." (see Luke 1:26-30)

Unexpected Messengers

Who has not received an unexpected late night phone call or knock at the door bring unexpected news we would not have received? A friend or stranger in need? A sudden illness or an accident or death? A phrase comes to mind: “No news is good news.” That is just not so. No news is NO NEWS. I think we can safely say that was the situation with both Elizabeth and Mary 2000 years ago. They both received unexpected news, but good news: what could explain the unintended pregnancies, other than a miracle, divine intervention?

Elizabeth was the senior of the two women and probably had lived a secure life as a 1st century Jewish woman, the wife of Zechariah, a “priest before God.” Reading the Gospel, we see the angel told Zechariah the news about the forthcoming birth of a son who would become a prophet, John the Baptist. As first, Zechariah did not believe the angel, and for his doubt he was rewarded with the inability to speak until John was born, which meant, of course, that he could not tell his wife, Elizabeth, the news! We are left to wonder how their relationship went during those nine months, but we can infer that Elizabeth was quite aware of something special was going to happen, not something bad. We read Elizabeth’s words in Luke 1:25: “This is what the Lord has done for me when he looked favorably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people.”

“Do Not be Afraid”

These are the words that Mary heard from the angel Gabriel. It is hard to imagine how Mary felt, unmarried, but betrothed to Joseph, upon hearing she would become pregnant by the Holy Spirit and bring a child into the world who would be called “Son of God.” Like Joseph’s dream visitation, this was a lot to take in! Gabriel assured her that “nothing will be impossible with God.” Mary must have taken the “do not be afraid” immediately to heart because she replied, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” That ended the revelation delivered by Gabriel, and then Gabriel departed. Later, Gabriel’s revelation is confirmed when Mary meets a then pregnant Elizabeth, and the unborn John “leaped for joy.”



The Unexpected According to Luke

What an outstanding series of events in the first chapters of Luke. These have been memorialized over the centuries as special psalms or songs:

- Mary's Song of Praise (the "Magnificat", Luke 1:46-56): *"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant."*
- Zechariah's Prophecy (the "Song of Zechariah", Luke 1:67-80): *"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David, ..."*
- Simeon's declaration when the young Jesus is presented at the temple (the "Song of Simeon", Luke 2:21-36): *"Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation ..."*

A Road Not Expected

Luke's nativity story in chapters 1 and 2 covers much more of the early life of John and Jesus than does Matthew's nativity story. In either case, the divine birth of Jesus the Christ forever altered Elizabeth's, Zechariah's, Joseph's, and Mary's lives. Zechariah and Elizabeth showed their remarkable faith and trust in God during the time of her pregnancy and subsequent life of their son John, who has been called "the last Old Testament Prophet." Joseph, too, showed patience and compassion during the time of Mary's pregnancy and early life of Jesus.

It is hard to imagine what was running through Mary's mind after the Gabriel's visitation: "I'm going to become pregnant, but not by my husband. My child will be called the son of God? What can all this mean?" But look at how she responded: "Here I am, the servant of the Lord." Wouldn't we all like to be blessed with Mary's calm obedience to God! Perhaps food for thought during advent: "how can we be a servant of the Lord?" May it be so. Amen.

Please keep in your prayers this week: thanksgiving for a grandson born a year ago; Elizabeth; Peter; those struggling with disease; the victims of tornadoes in the Southern US; for refugees struggling around the world. (Leviticus 19:34: "You must treat the foreigner living among you as native-born and love him as yourself, for you were foreigners in the land of Egypt. I am the LORD your god.")

For the third week of Advent, we light the candle of **joy**, the pink candle. Also known as the "shepherd candle", it is in this third week of advent that we rejoice for the coming King. The shepherds experienced joy at the good news of the birth of the Messiah in Luke's Gospel.

