

## Psalm 33

- <sup>1</sup> Sing joyfully to the LORD, you righteous;  
it is fitting for the upright to praise him.
- <sup>2</sup> Praise the LORD with the harp;  
make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre.
- <sup>3</sup> Sing to him a new song;  
play skillfully, and shout for joy.
- <sup>4</sup> For the word of the LORD is right and true;  
he is faithful in all he does.
- <sup>5</sup> The LORD loves righteousness and justice;  
the earth is full of his unfailing love.

## Luke 1

<sup>39</sup> At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, <sup>40</sup> where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. <sup>41</sup> When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. <sup>42</sup> In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! <sup>43</sup> But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? <sup>44</sup> As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. <sup>45</sup> Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"

<sup>46</sup> And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord <sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, <sup>48</sup> for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, <sup>49</sup> for the Mighty One has done great things for me- holy is his name. <sup>50</sup> His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. <sup>51</sup> He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. <sup>52</sup> He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. <sup>53</sup> He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty <sup>54</sup> He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful <sup>55</sup> to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors."

JOY OR REJOICE IS THE THEME OF THE THIRD WEEK IN ADVENT.

THE PSALMIST CALLS FOR GOD'S PEOPLE TO REJOICE IN HIS LOVE AND GOODNESS. BUT WHAT DOES THAT REALLY MEAN?

C.S. LEWIS DESCRIBED JOY AS: "THE SERIOUS BUSINESS OF HEAVEN...JOY IS OUR ENJOYMENT OF GOD AND THE GOOD THINGS THAT COME FROM GOD...."

MOTHER TERESA PUT IT A LITTLE DIFFERENTLY: "JOY IS A NET OF LOVE BY WHICH YOU CAN CATCH SOULS."

TOGETHER BOTH DESCRIPTIONS OF JOY TEACH US THAT OUR ENJOYMENT OF GOD IS MEANT TO BE SHARED AND CAN CHANGE NOT ONLY OUR LIVES BUT BLESS THE LIVES OF OTHERS AS WELL.

WE ARE ALSO REMINDED BY THOSE DEFINITIONS, AS WELL AS THE TESTIMONY OF SCRIPTURE, THAT JOY IS NOT SO MUCH A GOOD FEELING AS IT IS GOD'S GOODNESS TOUCHING US IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES, EVEN WHEN WE MAY NOT FEEL IT.

THE BIBLE ALSO REMINDS US THAT JOY, WHICH HAS ITS SOURCE IN GOD, SOMETIMES IS ACCOMPANIED WITH CHALLENGES.

THE CHALLENGES OFTEN ARE BORN OUT OF GOD'S ACTIONS WITHIN AND AROUND US AND HOW WE AND OTHERS REACT TO WHAT GOD IS DOING.

GODLY CHALLENGES USUALLY REQUIRES ACCEPTANCE THAT GOD IS INTERVENING IN THINGS, ALONG WITH OBEDIENCE WHEN THE LORD ASKS FOR OUR COOPERATION.

THE BIBLE SHOWS THAT GOD WILL HELP THOSE WHOM HE CALLS TO FACE THE CHALLENGES BEFORE THEM.

IN FACT, SCRIPTURE TESTIFIES GOD WILL HELP THOSE WHO LOVE HIM TO EVEN FACE THINGS NOT OF GOD'S DOING.

THIS BRINGS US TO CONSIDER THAT THE BLESSINGS GOD GIVES ARE NOT ALWAYS THE ONES WE CHOOSE.

AND THOSE CIRCUMSTANCES CAN BECOME TIMES WHEN WE REALLY NEED GOD'S SUPPORT AND BLESSING.

THINK OF IT THIS WAY: YOU MAY HAVE SEEN FROM TIME TO TIME A ONCE POPULAR SIGN WHICH SAYS: "BLESS THIS MESS."

I ALWAYS THOUGHT I SHOULD GET ONE OF THOSE FOR MYSELF, SINCE MY HOUSE KEEPING WOULD NOT WIN ANY AWARDS.

AND, WHEN THERE IS A MESS WE CAN'T OR WON'T DEAL WITH, IT MIGHT NOT BE A BAD IDEA TO ASK GOD TO BLESS IT.

BUT WE MIGHT ALSO CONSIDER THE MEANING OF "MESS" TO BE SOMETHING OTHER THAN CLUTTER.

SAYING SOMETHING IS MESSY CAN BE ANOTHER WAY TO DESCRIBE ANYTHING THAT HAPPENS THAT IS OUT OF THE ORDINARY, OR DISRUPTS OUR NORMAL ROUTINE.

THEREFORE, SOME MIGHT SEE THIS SEASON AS A TIME THAT CREATES MANY LITERAL AND FIGURATIVE MESSES.

THE CLASSIC WORLDLY EXAMPLE OF GOD BLESSING A SEASONAL MESS IS IN THE PEANUTS "A CHARLIE BROWN'S CHRISTMAS."

YOU MAY RECALL CHARLIE BROWN LIKES CHRISTMAS BUT IS ALSO DISMAYED WITH THE COMMERCIALIZATION OF THE DAY AND THE EMPHASIS ON PRESENTS.

HE HELPS WITH THE CHRISTMAS PLAY BUT THE UNCOOPERATIVE CAST AND OTHER EVENTS TAKE AWAY FROM THE MEANING OF CHRISTMAS.

WHEN HE IS TASKED WITH FINDING A BRIGHT AND SHINY FAKE TREE-CHARLIE BROWN OPTS INSTEAD FOR A STRAGGLY LIVE TREE.

HE IS TOLD HE HAS MADE A MESS OF IT BY PICKING SUCH A POOR TREE.

BUT THEN LINUS TELLS THE BIBLICAL CHRISTMAS STORY AND HEARTS ARE TRANSFORMED, AND SO IS CHARLIE BROWN'S CHRISTMAS TREE.

BY HIS STORY, PEANUTS CREATOR CHARLES SHULTZ, SHOWS HOW GOD'S WORD CAN BLESS EVEN THE MESS WE MAY MAKE OF THE CELEBRATION OF CHRISTMAS.

HOWEVER, IT IS ALSO TRUE THAT THERE HAVE BEEN TIMES WHEN PEOPLE ENCOUNTER MESSY CIRCUMSTANCES, THAT CAN BE ATTRIBUTED TO GOD.

IN PARTICULAR THERE ARE THINGS THAT THE LORD HAS DONE THAT HAVE CAUGHT PEOPLE UNAWARES AND CREATED WHAT MIGHT BE CONSIDERED A SOCIAL OR RELIGIOUS MESS.

THE GOSPEL READING FROM LUKE REVEALS HOW GOD MESSED WITH THE LAW OF NATURE HE INSTITUTED- IN ORDER TO FULFILL HIS WILL IN WAYS THAT CIRCUMVENTED, NATURAL EVENTS.

WE BEGIN WITH MARY, WHO WAS LIVING HER VERY ORDINARY LIFE AS A BETROTHED YOUNG WOMAN.

SHE WAS DOING HER DAILY TASKS AND PREPARING, FOR HER FORTH COMING MARRIAGE TO A CARPENTER NAMED JOSEPH.

SUDDENLY THE ANGEL GABRIEL APPEARS WITH NEWS THAT GOD HAS CHOSEN HER TO BEAR AND GIVE BIRTH TO HIS SON, WHO IS THE PROMISED MESSIAH.

WHILE MARY APPRECIATES THE HONOR AND INDEED IS OVERWHELMED BY THE ANNOUNCEMENT, IT DOES COMPLICATE THINGS, SINCE SHE IS NOT YET MARRIED.

GABRIEL ASSURES HER GOD HAS TAKEN CARE OF THAT, AND ALSO LETS HER KNOW HER KINSWOMAN ELIZABETH, IS IN A DIFFERENT WAY, MIRACULOUSLY WITH CHILD.

HERE IS A PRIME EXAMPLE OF GOD MESSING WITH OUR PLANS IN ORDER TO ACCOMPLISH HIS WILL.

YES, IT WAS A GOOD THING TO HAPPEN TO MARY, BUT ALSO A LITTLE FRIGHTENING, AS WELL AS CHALLENGING.

THE GOSPEL PASSAGE OPENS WITH MARY RUSHING TO ELIZABETH, FOR SURELY IF ANYONE COULD BELIEVE MARY'S STORY IT WOULD BE ANOTHER WHOM GOD ALSO TOUCHED.

SPEAKING OF ELIZABETH, SHE LIVED FOR YEARS UNDER THE SIGMA OF BARRENNESS AND WAS NOW AN OLD WOMAN.

SHE PROBABLY DESIRED A CHILD MORE THAN ANYTHING, BUT AT THAT POINT IN TIME THE LAST THING SHE EXPECTED WAS TO BE EXPECTING A CHILD.

TRULY, WHAT HAPPENED TO EACH WOMAN, ALTHOUGH BY VASTLY DIFFERENT MEANS, WAS SOMETHING THAT WAS HUMANLY IMPOSSIBLE.

THEY EACH WERE GIVEN BY GOD A WONDERFUL MESS TO DEAL WITH BY THE GIFT OF THE CHILDREN THEY WOULD GIVE BIRTH TO.

BUT NOTICE, HOW GOD ALSO BLESSED BOTH WOMEN BY GIVING THEM EACH OTHER FOR SUPPORT.

MARY, AS WE KNOW, DID NOT MISS THE HINT GABRIEL GAVE TO HER WHEN HE TOLD HER ABOUT ELIZABETH.

SHE WENT TO VISIT HER KINSWOMAN ALMOST IMMEDIATELY, WHICH WAS EXACTLY THE RIGHT THING TO DO.

NO SOONER WAS THE SOUND OF MARY'S VOICE HEARD THAN DID THE CHILD IN ELIZABETH'S WOMB LEAP FOR JOY.

AND THE HOLY SPIRIT LET ELIZABETH KNOW IT WAS NOT AN ORDINARY MOVEMENT, BUT HER CHILD ACKNOWLEDGING WITH JOY THE CHILD WITHIN MARY.

THEREFORE, ELIZABETH WAS FILLED WITH JOY THAT MARY SHOULD HONOR HER BY COMING TO VISIT HER, AS WELL AS SEEK HER COMPANIONSHIP AND SUPPORT.

MARY ALSO FOUND JOY IN GOD LETTING ELIZABETH KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO HER WITHOUT MARY NEEDING TO FIND THE WORDS TO BREAK THE GOOD NEWS.

THIS LEADS MARY TO BURST INTO A SONG OF JOY OVER THE WONDERS GOD IS DOING AND WILL DO, INCLUDING GOD GIVING HER A ROLE IN THOSE GLORIOUS DEEDS.

IF WE THINK ABOUT, WE WILL REALIZE THAT SOME OF THE THINGS MARY IS JOYFUL ABOUT INVOLVES GOD MAKING A MESS OF THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ORDER.

GOD, SHE SAYS, WILL TRANSFORM HUMAN REALITY AND EXPECTATIONS, WHEN THE PROUD FALL AND THE HUMBLE ARE LIFTED UP.

THE REALLY GOOD NEWS IS THOSE THINGS WILL BE DONE IN ORDER TO BLESS GOD'S PEOPLE AND FULFILL THE PROMISES THE LORD HAS MADE.

MARY'S WORDS AFFIRM THE WORDS OF THE PSALM 33 WHICH REJOICES IN GOD'S STEADFAST LOVE AND CREATIVE POWER.

IT ALSO REJOICES IN GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS AND JUSTICE, WHICH DO NOT ALWAYS CONFORM WITH THE WORLDLY WAYS OR INTERPRETATION OF THOSE THINGS.

MARY ECHOES THIS WHEN SHE PROCLAIMS GOD'S ACTION IN SCATTERING THE THOUGHTS AND WORLD VIEW OF THE PROUD.

JESUS CERTAINLY DID THAT IN HIS PUBLIC MINISTRY AND ON THE CROSS.

HE CONTINUES TO SCATTER PROUD THOUGHTS FROM THE HEARTS OF THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.

JESUS ALSO WILL BRING US DOWN SOME, OR LIFT US UP, DEPENDING ON WHAT WE NEED THE MOST AT THE MOMENT.

THESE EXPERIENCES ARE PART OF LIVING AS THOSE SAVED BY JESUS AS WE INVITE GOD'S INTERFERENCE AND INTERSESSION IN OUR LIVES.

THIS IS ONE WAY WE LIVE IN OBEDIENCE TO THE LORD AS WE ACCEPT OUR CALLING AS FOLLOWERS OF JESUS.

WE ARE SHOWN BY ELIZABETH AND MARY THE VALUE OF REJOICING IN GOD'S PRESENCE, ESPECIALLY IN OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS.

SO LET US LOOK AGAIN TO MARY, WHO'S SOUL MAGNIFIES, MEANING CELEBRATES, THE LORD HER GOD.

SHE IS JOYFUL OVER THE GREAT AND WONDERFUL, AND IMPOSSIBLE THINGS GOD IS DOING AND WILL DO.

FURTHERMORE, THE JOY FOUND IN GOSPEL PASSAGE CONNECTS ELIZABETH, JOHN, AND MARY TOGETHER AS THE FIRST ONES WHO REJOICE IN THE COMING OF JESUS INTO THE WORLD.

INDEED, GOD HAS DONE WHAT IS IMPOSSIBLE ACCORDING TO WORLDLY WISDOM, UNDERSTANDING, AND BIOLOGICAL LAWS.

THEREFORE, IN THE MIDST OF GOD'S ACTIONS THE THREE ARE BONDED TOGETHER IN THEIR REJOICING.

INDEED, EACH REJOICE IN HIS OR HER OWN WAY-BECAUSE NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE WITH GOD WHEN THE LORD WISHES IT TO BE SO.

THEIR JOY IS NOT A MATTER OF RELIGIOUS DEVOTION, BUT INSTEAD IS ROOTED IN GOD'S ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THEIR LIVES, AND IN THE WORLD THROUGH THEM.

THEY SHOW US THAT TO REJOICE IN THE LORD MEANS TO DELIGHT IN GOD, AND TRULY PRAISE THE LORD IN ONE'S HEART AS WELL AS WITH ONE'S VOICE OR ACTIONS.

THEY ALSO TEACH US THAT JOY COMES TO US WHEN WE OBEY THE LORD EVEN WHEN DOING SO IS DIFFICULT OR FRIGHTENING.

THE JOY THEY PROMOTE IS THAT WHICH FINDS ITS SOURCE IN GOD.

AND THIS JOY IS GIVEN BACK TO THE LORD IN PRAISE, AS WELL AS SHARED WITH OTHERS THROUGH SONG OR PROCLAMATION.

GOD, THE GOSPEL STORY REMINDS US, BROUGHT MARY AND ELIZABETH TOGETHER SO THAT THEY COULD BOTH AFFIRM THE SOURCE OF THEIR JOY, AND SHARE THEIR JOY TOGETHER.

WE TOO ARE MEANT TO JOIN TOGETHER FOR BOTH WORSHIP OF, AND REJOICING IN, THE LORD OUR GOD WHO HAS DONE GREAT THINGS FOR US, AND SOMETIMES THROUGH US.

GREAT THINGS, WE SHOULD REMEMBER, WHEN IT COMES TO GOD ARE NOT ALWAYS WHAT THE WORLD JUDGES AS GREATNESS.

A KIND WORD OR SMALL ACT OF LOVE MAY DO SOMETHING POWERFUL WITHIN ANOTHER, AND THUS BRING A SMALL BLESSING INTO THE LIFE OF SOMEONE IN A MESS.

WE MAY NEVER KNOW IT, BUT THAT DOES NOT DIMINISH THE FACT GOD HAS USED US TO BLESS ANOTHER PERSON, OR AT TIMES, EVEN AN ANIMAL.

JOY AFTER ALL DOES NOT ONLY BEGIN IN IMPOSSIBLE OR MESSY CIRCUMSTANCES, BUT CAN ALSO BE BORN AND FLOURISH IN THE ORDINARY MOMENTS OF LIFE.

THEREFORE, MAY THE WORDS OF THE OPENING HYMN INSPIRE US TO RESPOND TO GOD'S GIFT OF OUR SAVIOR AND THE JOY HE PROVIDES.

"JOY TO THE WORLD THE LORD IS COME, LET EARTH RECEIVE HER KING. LET EVERY HEART, PREPARE HIM ROOM AND HEAVEN AND NATURE SING."

MAY WE CONTINUE TO PREPARE FOR CHRISTMAS BY OPENING OUR HEARTS TO ACCEPT ANEW THE GIFT OF JESUS, AND THE JOY GOD'S SPIRIT IMPLANTS WITHIN US.

MAY WE NEVER CEASE TO CLING TO JESUS AND ENJOY OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD THROUGH HIM. AMEN

SERMON SUMMARY: PSALM 33:1-5 & LUKE 1:39-55

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