

**SERMON TITLE-** "The Last Advent- Mary's Song"

**TEXT-** Luke 1:39-56

**PREACHED AT-** Neighbourhood Church

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If Advent is the season of waiting and preparation for Christmas- then today- the last of the Advent Sunday is certainly the climax. The weeks of expectation have now wound down and the next big event is Christmas itself.

The wait is almost over.

And so- it is fitting that we now turn our attention to what has come to be called, The Magnificat- or Mary's Song. In any birth story the last word must go to the mother. And now we hear from Jesus' mother on this last Sunday of Advent.

The setting is given in the verses that precede it.

**At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. Luke 1:39-40**

Mary had been visited by the angel who told her that she would become pregnant by the Holy Spirit. It was a shocking message but Mary answered-

**"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her. Luke 1:38**

What do you do with an encounter like that? You need to talk to someone. But whom could you talk to about something about such a personal and complex subject?

It turns out that the angel had given Mary a suggestion.

**The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God." Luke 1:35-37**

There is was- even before Mary realized she would need someone to talk to- the angel had planted the name of the person in her mind.

And as the Advent story and Mary's place in it unfolds, a deep principle is laid out-

### **#1. We Need To Talk Out Life's Challenges**

There are some things that increase in importance the longer I am a pastor- this is one. We need to find ways to talk out the complex and troubling aspects of our lives.

There are of course those of us who find it easy to talk but talking is different from sharing the complicated things in life with trusted people.

The Bible puts a great deal of stress on this- it is not optional.

When we sin- we are supposed to confess it.

When we decide to make Jesus Master- we are to confess it

When we are blessed- we are to sing about it

It's all about getting what is inside of us out- and doing it in a "public" type of context.

And so when Mary hears from the angel that she will become pregnant- she needs someone to talk to and God provides someone who will understand- it is Elizabeth.

And so it is no wonder that Mary "hurried" off to her.

Mary arrives at Elizabeth's door-  
**When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Luke 1:41**

## **#2. God Provides**

God provided for Mary's need.

God not only provided Mary with a friend who would listen and care- God also provides a friend, a companion who is filled with the Holy Spirit and can be with her in a supernatural way.

Mary by now is already carrying the tiny child. If the timing that seems to be implied by the text is correct then Mary has arrived at Elizabeth's house within weeks of conception.

It is not hard for us to understand why 2 women, one carrying John the Baptist, and the other Jesus Himself, would feel an awesome sense of something. That is the given- it is why Christmas plays and programs have the great sentimental power that they do. We assume that this is how things work.

But the problem with great evocative stories is that they do 2 very unhelpful things-

1. They get us looking for powerful emotions in our own lives. We start to crave drama and discount the ordinary run of our own real lives. We want our lives to resemble a great movie's story line. Life is rarely like that. It isn't how we live- even if there are times when we can look back and see a great story.

2. They distance us from the actual message of Mary's story. The important message of the story is that God cares for each of us-

-just as He cares for Mary.

-And just as He cares for us He has assignments for us that we can accept or reject

-And when we accept assignments that are challenging- God also provides real people to walk with us.

We do of course have to do what Mary did- get up and hurry over to those God has given us- and share our joys and struggles with them.

When we do that, the Holy Spirit responds within us- just as He did within Mary.

And when Elizabeth sees Mary-

**In a loud voice she exclaimed: "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 1:42-43**

**"As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!" Luke 1:44-45**

Mary received from Elizabeth what everyone with a challenge needs to hear- real encouragement and blessing from a real person.

Mary who is dealing with the most complex and confusing future that anyone can imagine has a friend she can talk to.

The bottom line from the first part of this story is- God provides.

This is a very such an important knowledge to have within us because- just like

Mary we are faced with mind bogglingly complex challenges- challenges which, like Mary's pregnancy leave us feeling all alone and misunderstood in the world's we live in.

The story of Mary's pregnancy is not just an amazing Christmas miracle- it is a lesson that we are supposed to read, understand, and make a part of our own approach to living.

So that leads to the next question- what is it about Mary that we are to take note of. The clue to that comes from Mary's Song or what I call, "The Song Of The Little Guy."

**And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me— holy is his name. Luke 1:46-49**

### **Mary Was A Thankful Person**

Mary is both "everyman" and a special person. She is "everyman" in that we are to look at her life and see ourselves.

But she is also a special example that we are to model ourselves after. There are reasons why she was the right person to be the mother of Jesus. These are qualities we are to emulate.

Elizabeth had already given us a glimpse into this. Mary was exemplary in her willingness to believe God.

Now Mary illustrates another trait that sets her apart. Mary is a humble and thankful person.

Thankfulness, of course is a treasured quality. Thankful people will rarely be without friends.

When I think of an example of a thankful person I have known, my mind immediately goes to a woman who came to our church for many years. Her name was Hilda McArthur. She walked into the church one Sunday and said, "I'm an 85 year old widow and am looking for a new church to call home." She was with us for the next 15 years until she passed away at 100 years old.

What made Hilda remarkable to all who knew her was her spirit of thankfulness. Everywhere she went she saw the best. It was not a superficial best either. We knew her through years of loss. I remember the day she came in and said, "I can't drive any more." "I have to give up my home." "I have to move into a full time care facility."

I remember how she told about falling in the bathtub and spending the night in it, unable to get out.

She even told me, one day, how it was becoming hard to pray. Prayer was something she did when she couldn't sleep. She, like many people of her generation, prayed through the list of her children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. So to find that when she needed to pray for her own strength that the ceiling seemed like brass was very difficult. She told me-

"All my life I have been praying for others but the other day I prayed for strength and my prayers did not get through. I learned something - when you can't pray- others have to do it for you. I never knew that before. I just prayed for everyone else because it seemed

right- because that is what I do. It felt very strange.”

What would you say to a confession like that? I probably just stumbled around a bit- but I was in the presence of a very thankful person- someone whose legacy I am determined to carry forward as best I can.

And where does that kind of thankfulness come from?

This leads to the 2nd thing we are supposed to learn from Mary.

### **Mary Was A Humble Person**

I believe that humility and thankfulness are qualities that go together because of what I observed in Hilda.

She was thankful because of a sense that she had that the things she was getting were truly unmerited.

True humility is a very unnatural quality but it is at the centre of what a Kingdom person is supposed to be. It begins as primary quality of Jesus-

**Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Matthew 11:29**

And from the example of Jesus it moves directly into an instruction to us. Learn from me.

In Philippians it is driven home-

**Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself . . . Philippians 2:5-8**

Mary was a humble person and God responded to her

**His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.**

**He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. Luke 1:50-53**

### **Mary Was Wise**

I'm sure that anyone reading Mary's Song and reading even the small fragments of the story of her life that we have in the Scriptures will have no quarrel with me when I say, "Mary was wise."

She just carried herself like a wise person and in doing so has the carriage of a wise mother. Mother's are supposed to be wise among other things, of course.

But from a Biblical perspective wisdom is not something that certain people with a certain bearing and tone of voice have- wisdom is to be a quality of all Kingdom people. Kingdom people have 2 errors to avoid-

First- claiming to be wise. People declare themselves wise

Second- claiming not to have wisdom.

How do we avoid these 2 errors? By understanding what Biblical wisdom is- It is a gift God gives His people.

This Biblical fact is emphatically stated in James 1

**If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without**

**finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; James 1:5-7**

That tells us how to avoid these 2 errors-  
First, realize we lack wisdom- and then ask for it. Wise people ask.  
Second, believe that we have received it. We now have been given God's gift of wisdom.

But James goes on to further explain wisdom.

**Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. James 3:13**

**14But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. 15Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. 16For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. James 3:14-16**

And there we have wisdom and humility rolled together into a single package. That is the package that Mary had- that is the package that God wants each of us to seize hold of.

While I was in the middle of working on this sermon- I got an email that made me very annoyed. It was an email that had been sent out to a whole list of people [not in this church BTW] and it seemed to me to come from a contentious divisive place.

I don't know if I need to tell you what I did. I composed a reply that in my opinion, shot back a blast. The person who wrote the email needed to be put swiftly into their place. There was no time to waste. It is amazing how clearly I can think when I am annoyed with someone.

I fired an email back to the person who wrote it and came so close to firing it back to the whole list that they had sent it out to.

If they were going to make a big public scene- then it would only be right to call them out in the same public way that they had just done.

But then I went back to my sermon and it was actually longer than it should have been before it struck me. What was missing in my response? Humility and if humility is missing- guess what else is missing? Wisdom.

**But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.**

**Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness. James 3:17-18**

That was far too practical a lesson to have to live with every week. But there it was. Remember Mary's humility- and put it into practice- starting now.

Now, if you have been trying to follow my train of thought, you may well have been wondering where on earth Mary's Song went to.

What does Mary, the Humble and Wise sing in her song?

**His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.**

**He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. Luke 1:50-53**

Mary, the Humble and Wise knew that God looks out for the little guy.

### **God Takes On His Battles- Not Us**

He is the one who will bring down the oppressors. He is the one who raise up Truth and scatter those who are proud in their inmost hearts. As a matter of fact- I quickly realized that when I mount my own high horse and prepare to charge off into battle against the opponents that I see- I quickly become one of those very proud that God will have to scatter. That was a sobering thought, I don't have to tell you.

As Kingdom people we don't scan the horizon for a "Gunslinger" to set things right- and, even more important, we make sure we don't start imagining ourselves as the "Gunslinger" to the rescue.

And Mary's Song has another phrase to it-  
**He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers. Luke 1:54-55**

What else did Mary, the Humble and Wise know in the deepest possible way?  
That-

### **God's Story Is Bigger Than We Are**

Our own agendas for how and when things should take place needs to be put on the shelf- again and again. God has a clock that does not reset every year, or every decade, or every lifetime.

Mary and he people lived with a promise that was 2000 years old. That was the promise given to Abraham. His promise was that He would be their God through all the challenges of life and beyond.

You and I live with the promise that Jesus brought 2000 years ago- that He brings us a way of peace that the world cannot see without him.

Mary's Song brings the Advent Season to a close- and with this we see that Mary is not just "the Mother of God", she is an illustration of God's provision for His people in hard times.

And it also shows Mary as an example for living that you and I are to take very personally.

The story of Mary's song ends with-  
**Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home. Luke 1:39-56**