

Sunday, December 24, 2017

Advent 4 10:00 am

Blessed?

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Luke 1:46b-55; Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38

Delivered to St. Stephen's Lutheran Church

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“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord my spirit rejoices in God my saviour.”

“From this day, all generations will call me blessed; for He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name.”

Blessed.

Blessed.

This word seems to be so over used in social media today...in our common vernacular we use it as if it were a filler or not really anything as miraculous and special as it was once used.

Ask people how they're doing and they reply: “blessed.”

People are “blessed” by a new car, or a new job, or “blessed” to be in a better situation than those that are not nearly as well off.

Don't get me wrong, blessings are abundant and everywhere you look, but you can't find them by clicking the 'share' button on Facebook in hopes of posting a sparkly little angel on your wall that reads “if you share this angel you will be blessed.”

We have overused that word and made it into something that draws a sharp line between those who have and those who have not.

We have turned it into a way of talking about having money, getting a job promotion, falling in love, recovering from an illness. And while all of these are wonderful things we need to ask ourselves, does that mean those who do not have a new car, a job promotion or their health less blessed than those that do?

The readings today were a bit backwards. Our gospel actually happens before the reading we did together in place of the Psalm.

Mary gets this odd visit from an angelic messenger, Gabriel, who tells her she has found favor with God and in that favor God invites her to take part in the story of God's salvation.

Mary ponders this in her heart. She ponders this, she thinks what sort of a message could this be? Because all people are favored by God. All people are part of God's greater story of salvation. And she wonders why she's singled out?

And a dialogue ensues.

The angel informs her that she will bear a son, and that he will be great, and will be named Jesus. Mary, an incredible young woman, yet fully aware how babies are made replies to the angel... "how could this be?"

Childbearing is important, and every child has the potential for greatness. And yet childbearing is a risky business whether you are aged like Elizabeth or youthful like Mary, there comes great risk.

And yet God and the angels do not force Mary's hand, they are patient and allow Mary to make the ultimate decision to say to God "here I am your servant."

And then a pregnant Mary goes off to visit her relative Elizabeth...and we read the monologue of Mary where she proclaims the greatness of the Lord...and the very fact that the generations would call her blessed.

Blessed.

But how can it be that simple? I mean look at her situation.

Pregnant before marriage.

At risk of losing her fiancé.

At risk of losing her life both in the dangers of childbearing and in the punishment of the pregnancy of an unwed mother.

The prospect of being a teen mom.

And we can keep adding to this list as the story continues: becoming a refugee in the land of Egypt, working incredibly hard as a young mother with a large family, the probability that she lost her husband Joseph early due to the age difference, watching as her son becomes the subject of the ire of not just Rome but of Jewish authorities, his trial his execution...how...how can any of this be seen as being blessed?

To borrow the words of Mary to Gabriel...“how could this be?”

She cries out:

“You the Almighty have done great things for me and Holy is your name”

Could it be?

Could it be? Could it be that the very thing God has done for Mary – God also does for us? Great things done for God on the behalf of God’s people...and Mary gets to do one of the most amazing and miraculous things...she gets to bring the light of God into the world.

Could it be that along with Mary, we get to see the greatness of God in the life of Jesus Christ – the idea that God is with us, part of us, and brings salvation not just to the people of Mary but for all generations?

Our Advent anticipations of a savior born into this manger is made real for us through the life and the affirmation of Mary – and it is no wonder why generations would call her blessed.

In this blessed birth that Mary is going to give, in the outskirts of the town in a dirty manger, we are going to be given a savior, God’s only son, born of Mary...born for us, a savior who died for us and who rose again from the grave for us.

A savior for us!

Blessings do not come in the form of cars, or jobs, or money...blessings come in the form of a small baby that came into this world, that broke through the sky and change the heart of humanity...to set us free from the power of evil and to give us a new life that will last forever.

This is a new life that lasts forever, for all people, not just the chosen few, not for those that have more than others, but for all people.

This life has power against evil.

This life has a light that the darkness can never overcome.

In this life none are excluded.

In this life all are welcome.

In this life all are cherished.

No wonder the angels sing Glory to God in the highest heaven – no wonder Mary is blessed by generations...though she lived through hardships...just as we live through hardships...she nonetheless affirmed God's request and took on the huge responsibility of being the mother of Jesus...the Christ that came not just for her, but for all of us.

There is a prayer that is well known to Roman Catholics and Episcopalians...the Hail Mary...Hail Mary full of Grace, the Lord is with you...blessed are you amongst women and blessed is the fruit of your womb Jesus...

Full of Grace and love and compassion, even to this generation we declare that Mary is blessed, and we ask God to enrich our lives with the blessings of Emmanuel...of God with us today, tomorrow and for all time.

Each of us, blessed to be a blessing...goes forth from this Advent into the anticipated Christmas Eve...into the birth of a baby in the manger once again. Let us look for the true blessings of God with us – and never forget to remind others that they too are blessings because God is with them as well.

Blessed Mary indeed...blessed are you all as well...and blessed is this holy time.