

I.N.I.

Third Sunday in Advent
Dec. 15, 2013
Luke 1:46-66

Let us rise and join in reading the first portion of our sermon text, Luke 1:46-56.

In Christ Jesus, who fills our hearts with joy, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

One of the best ways to look forward in joy is by looking back. Mary's joy was increased as she saw herself as a participant in the whole history of God's blessings on His people Israel. What a great blessing was hers alone by God's grace: to be chosen as the mother of the Savior of the world. Indeed as long as generations come and go she shall be called blessed; for God has done great things for her.

But we also see in Mary's song of praise that God has done great things for His children throughout all ages and will continue to do so until the end of time. Mary's joy was further increased as she professed this blessed paradox; that those who have, have not; while those who have not, have. Let's look at vs. 50-53 once more...**AND HIS MERCY IS ON THOSE WHO FEAR HIM FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION. HE HAS SHOWN STRENGTH WITH HIS ARM; HE HAS SCATTERED THE PROUD IN THE IMAGINATION OF THEIR HEARTS. HE HAS PUT DOWN THE MIGHTY FROM THEIR THRONES, AND EXALTED THE LOWLY. HE HAS FILLED THE HUNGRY WITH GOOD THINGS, AND THE RICH HE HAS SENT AWAY EMPTY.**

**HERE HE COMES! REJOICE!
I: REJOICE, THAT GOD'S MERCY IS GIVEN
PRECISELY TO THOSE WHO NEED IT.**

Knowing this, with hearts of faith we will thankfully acknowledge all that we have as having come from a merciful and gracious God. Mary says that those who revere God's name shall receive blessings from one generation to another. As parents teach their children and they in turn teach their children to worship and revere the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord's blessings are passed down from generation to generation.

But for those who are proud in their own imagination, who look upon themselves as being the most important ones, who rely on themselves and their own good works and live only for this life and neglect the God who not only gave them life, but who has secured for them eternal life; they will be scattered with His mighty arm.

Mary declares that the mighty upon thrones, the Lord has put down, while the ones of low estate He has raised up. He has filled the hungry with good things, while the rich He has sent away empty.

These words were indeed fulfilled in Jesus' day. The proud, the mighty rulers, the rich of Jesus' day did not want anything to do with this lowly Rabbi. They didn't flock to Him and follow after Him. To whom did Jesus turn? To whom did He bestow His blessings of forgiveness and the message of eternal life? Upon whom did He perform most of His miracles?

Upon the people of the streets, the ones of low estate, those who hungered and thirsted after the forgiveness He offered, upon those who revered His name and longed for the everlasting life and salvation He offered. The proud Pharisees, the rich Sadducees and the powerful Priests were not chosen as Jesus disciples. It was the lowly fishermen, the tax collectors, the uneducated that were most of His followers. The others would not listen. So those who had, those who believed themselves to be rich with self-righteousness and good works and full of their own goodness were sent away empty. The self-centered proud priests were scattered and the mighty rulers who refused to bow the knee and submit to the Lord Jesus were brought down. While those who did not have; the lowly not only in social standing but in heart, the humble, were exalted; those who were hungry for forgiveness were filled, those who were poor in spirit were made rich in Christ's righteousness and those who revered His name He has blessed from one generation to another.

Are we one of those who need God's mercy? Pray God that He leads us to realize that we are, that He leads us to realize just how great our need is. We are the spiritual lowly, the destitute, without any goodness or worthiness of our own. By the power of the Holy Spirit working in our hearts through the Law we are led to realize our many sins and are led to hunger for the spiritual blessings of forgiveness, life and salvation. There is an emptiness in the heart and soul of all who do not know Jesus as their Lord

and Savior. But they cannot realize that emptiness unless the Spirit first works true repentance in their hearts, a godly sorrow over their sins and their lost spiritual condition.

Thank God that when we look back on our past we see times when the Lord has scattered the sinful pride that was in our hearts, and put us down, laid us low, reprimanded us. Thank God that He at times sent us away empty when we were expressing thoughts of self-righteousness and self-reliance, let us come crashing down in humility. Those times in our lives are also clear evidences of God's great love for us, for His mercy is given precisely to those who need it most...that is, to those who have been led to acknowledge their lost, sinful condition.

May the Holy Spirit give us humble hearts, hungry hearts, repentant hearts. Hearts that are led to sorrow over our many, many sins in thought, word and deed; to revere our Lord above all things and to hunger and thirst after the righteousness that Christ gives us freely through His perfect obedient life and atoning sacrificial death upon the cross. For we who have been led to realize that we have not, now have; we who have been led to realize we need the most, have been given the **BEST**. We who have been led to see our hungry and thirsting souls have been filled with Christ's righteousness.

Let us rise and join in confessing our sins to our merciful Lord and God on page 12 in our W.S.

Let us read together verses 57-63.

HERE HE COMES! REJOICE!
II: REJOICE, MAKE SURE THAT THE REAL REASON
FOR YOUR JOY IS EXPRESSED

How natural it is that joy is shared. And how important! Elizabeth's neighbors and relatives rejoiced with her. But why? How easy it is to share joy and yet fail to recognize the reason for the joy. In the case of Elizabeth's neighbors and relatives, that reason was expressed. We are told, **THEY HEARD HOW THE LORD HAD SHOWN GREAT MERCY TO HER**. That was their reason for rejoicing, because of God's great mercy. And isn't that, shouldn't that be the same with us.

The birth of a child, like little Eleanor, is but one experience of many in our lives that provide us with the opportunity to express the real reason for our joy. That new born child is a gift, a gift from our Heavenly Father, the Giver of all good gifts. He alone is the Creator of life. Do we profess that? Do we state that in our rejoicing---how about in our weddings, graduations, promotions, anniversaries, birthdays, successes, daily blessings, health, travels, Thanksgiving and Christmas celebrations and the list goes on and on? Do we make sure that the real reason for our rejoicing is expressed? Is the real reason for our joy and rejoicing found in us, in the event or in the One who has given us that blessing?

Neighbors and relatives were the natural ones for sharing the joy of the birth of this baby, John, and they are also the natural, logical place for us to begin. No doubt most of us will be sharing our Christmas with family and good friends. Will we make sure that they will know the real reason for our joy at Christmas time? Will that joy in Christ be expressed by us to them? Will they hear us proclaim that our God has shown us great mercies in the person of the Christ-child, that our joy is in the Savior who has been born to take our place to live and to die for us?

Or, will they mistake our joy and the reason for it to be like the rest of the world, a time for partying and relaxation, for family gathering, feasting and exchanging of gifts and no more? May we say out loud in the presence of others that our reason for rejoicing at this Christmas time is because of the greatest gift ever given, the Father's gift of His Son Jesus, the Babe in Bethlehem, the only Savior who has come to exchange His life for ours.

Let us join in professing this joy in the words of the Apostles' Creed on pg. 15. Hymn

Let us rise and read together verses 64-66.

HERE HE COMES! REJOICE!
III: REJOICE, FOR NOW IS THE TIME TO PRAISE THE LORD.

What would you have said? If you had been struck dumb for 3/4 of a year and suddenly found that you could speak again, what would be the first words out of your mouth? "Thank you, thank you, thank you!" Perhaps, more to the point is this question. How much would you appreciate the gift of speech after having it been taken away from you and then getting it back again?

What about other gifts: the gift of sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell, walking and running, thinking and singing? The list could here could also go on and on. For most of us, these gifts have not been taken away, but have been ours continually throughout our lives.

How much do we appreciate them? And these are neither the sum total nor the greatest of blessings we have received from our God. Someone has said: **SOME OF THE GREATEST BLESSINGS OF GOD MAY BE THOSE WE TAKE MOST FOR GRANTED!** Would we be more upset over having lost our sight, or lost our faith? Are we more thankful and appreciative of the end of the year raise, the Christmas bonus or of the forgiveness of sins and everlasting life?

We read again verse 64...**IMMEDIATELY HIS MOUTH WAS OPENED AND HIS TONGUE LOOSED, AND HE SPOKE, PRAISING GOD.** Zacharias used his new-found voice to praise God. That was his first response. Mary used her voice to praise the Lord for the great things He had done for her and for all of mankind. Elizabeth used her voice to praise her Lord for her child and the baby, the Savior, Mary was carrying. How will we use the gifts we have been given, the ones that have not been removed and then restored, but the ones that have been piling up, day after day throughout our lives? How will we use them this Christmas season?

REJOICE, FOR NOW IS THE TIME TO PRAISE THE LORD!

It is so easy, especially at these holiday times, to enjoy God's blessings, but then fail to express our joy in praise to our God. Our mid-week Advent services, our special Christmas Eve service and our Christmas Day song service are all opportunities for us to magnify our God, that is to praise His name in word and song for the greatest of all blessings: His Son, Jesus Christ.

God has made us His children through faith in Christ. He has forgiven us all of our sins through His Son's sacrifice. He has given us the promise of everlasting life and an eternal salvation with Him in heaven.

That blessing of eternity was once mankind's. Adam and Eve enjoyed perfect peace in the Garden of Eden, but because of sin it was lost. Now it is restored again. May the appreciation we have for the greatest of all gifts show in our lives, in our words, in our actions, in our worship and praise, in our serving and giving of gifts, in the way we celebrate Christmas this year--with sincere, deep appreciation for the gift of the Christ-child, our Lord and Savior.

Rejoice, but don't wait! For now is the time to praise the Lord!

Amen.