

I.N.I.

First Mid-week Advent
December 1, 2010
Luke 1:41-45

In Christ Jesus, whose coming we eagerly anticipate and look forward to, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Sir Isaac Newton first presented his three [laws of motion](#) in 1686. His third law states that “for every action in nature there is an equal and opposite reaction.” I was thinking of this Law when we settled on this theme for our Advent series: **REACTIONS TO JESUS’ BIRTH.**

I am sure that Sir Isaac was not thinking at all about this act in nature—the birth of the God-Man, Savior of all of mankind, but there definitely were equal and opposite reactions to that action. This Advent we will be looking at three reactions to Jesus’ birth---the unborn baby, John; the fearful, jealous King Herod, and the believing Shepherds. Many actions get reactions.

A little more than two years ago due to the financial crisis that came about with the housing market collapse and so many loans being liquidated there was quite a reaction. Democrats were elected and continued to control both the House and the Senate and took over the White House.

An equal reaction to this election was that liberals pushed their agendas and a multi-billion dollar stimulus package was passed and initiated; a universal health care bill was passed; and the country has a 13 trillion dollar debt.

The opposite reaction to that election was that the Tea Party was formed and this past fall many Republicans were elected regaining the House and the Democratic President has lost some of his power. What will be the equal and opposite reaction to this election within the next two years and two years from now? Time will tell.

The birth of a baby also gets reactions. It usually elicits a joyous reaction, whether it is the first or fifth baby. Congratulations are given, thanksgiving is offered to the Lord for a safe delivery and a healthy child and the parents now have a new life they are responsible for. The reaction to that, especially for first-time parents, is sometime overwhelming---fear, apprehension, anxiety with great joy and happiness.

But there has never been a birth like this one that elicited so many reactions from so many people. The first that we will be studying this evening and applying to our lives was a miracle of God’s grace. It was the reaction of another baby who was not even born.

After Mary received the news from the Angel Gabriel that she would conceive and give birth to the Son of God, the Savior of all of mankind, she quickly made her way up into the hill country to visit with her elderly cousin Elizabeth, to rejoice with her over Elizabeth’s good news and also to share her own miraculous news. And even as God caused two miraculous conceptions in the wombs of these women, He brings about another miracle as they meet. When Elizabeth hears Mary’s greeting, the unborn baby, leaps in his mother’s womb and Elizabeth is filled with a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit. She immediately knows why Mary has come and through inspiration Elizabeth says to Mary: **“BLESSED ARE YOU AMONG WOMEN, AND BLESSED IS THE FRUIT OF YOUR WOMB! BUT WHY IS THIS GRANTED TO ME, THAT THE MOTHER OF MY LORD SHOULD COME TO ME? FOR INDEED, AS SOON AS THE VOICE OF YOUR GREETING SOUNDED IN MY EARS, THE BABY LEAPED IN MY WOMB FOR JOY. BLESSED IS SHE WHO BELIEVED, FOR THERE WILL BE A FULFILLMENT OF THOSE THINGS WHICH WERE TOLD HER FROM THE LORD.**

Through a miracle of God’s Grace, a special revelation from the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth now knew

what only Mary knew: that she was going to give birth to the Messiah, the Son of God, the Savior of the world. That is why Elizabeth speaks the very same words the angel Gabriel did earlier to Mary: **BLESSED ARE YOU AMONG WOMEN.** The greatest honor the Lord has ever bestowed upon a woman is now being conferred upon Mary. She would be the Mother of the Son of God.

What a special blessing it is for any woman to conceive a life, carry it under her heart for nine months and then give birth. Every conception and birth is a miracle of God's grace; a creation of life in a mother's womb. But when that child is the very Son of God, God in human flesh, what a special blessing and honor. But the greatest blessing to Mary was that she believed. Elizabeth said, **BLESSED IS SHE WHO BELIEVED, FOR THERE WILL BE A FULFILLMENT OF THOSE THINGS WHICH WERE TOLD HER FROM THE LORD.**

Elizabeth shows by her words that she too believes that her unmarried, virgin cousin was going to give birth to the Christ. But we also heard of another witness to this miracle. Her unborn child, John, leaps for joy in her womb for he too was now in the presence of His Lord and Savior.

Every one of you women who have given birth have experienced and felt the movement of your unborn baby. Fathers too have felt the kick, maybe even seen the little bump as the baby stretches its arms and legs while in the womb. Was that what this was, a natural movement of an unborn baby in the womb? Or did Elizabeth's excitement set off the baby so it too became agitated in the womb? Neither of these things.

Remember the words of the Angel Gabriel to Zacharias. He prophesied of this when he told Zacharias: **FOR HE (JOHN) WILL BE GREAT IN THE SIGHT OF THE LORD, AND SHALL DRINK NEITHER WINE NOR STRONG DRINK. HE WILL ALSO BE FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT, EVEN FROM HIS MOTHER'S WOMB.**

The unborn baby John was reacting to Mary's words of greeting under the influence of the Holy Spirit. This was a miracle of the Holy Spirit working upon the heart of this unborn baby. He was to be the forerunner of this Savior, and already, even before his birth, he is excited and is leaping for joy in His presence. This is his first greeting of his Lord and Savior.

Do we find this odd, strange, even unbelievable? We shouldn't! The unborn John was filled with the Holy Spirit even as Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is not bound by the age of reason in children. That would rob Him of His omnipotence and the power of the Gospel that He works through. And if the Spirit can work in the unborn John, it follows that He can work in the hearts of any unborn baby, or newly born baby, and create faith in them. To say that babies cannot believe is denying the power of the Holy Spirit and casting doubt on our text this evening.

What excitement, what feeling of awe and wonder there must have been between these two women in witnessing and in experiencing the power and glory of God and the fulfillment of over 4,000 years of prophetic history.

And what a **HUMBLE** response we see from Elizabeth. She says: **BUT WHY IS THIS GRANTED TO ME, THAT THE MOTHER OF MY LORD SHOULD COME TO ME?** In other words, "why am I so favored, to have this visit from the mother of my Lord, my Savior?" Elizabeth acknowledges that the child Mary is carrying is none other than the Promised Messiah, the Christ.

This greatest of miracles, God come in human flesh and blood, Immanuel, "God with us" in human form, was believed by Elizabeth, was acknowledged with joy by the unborn John but is denied by so many today; even by so called theologians and religious teachers. They use their vaunted intelligence and wisdom, their human reason and come up with such statements, as "the notion of the pre-existent Son of God becoming a human being in the womb of a virgin and then returning to His heavenly home is bound up with a mythological picture of the world that clashes

with our modern scientific world view...the primary interest of the study of doctrine is to interpret the virgin birth as a symbol and not as a freakish intervention in the course of nature...Biblically, the birth narratives in Matthew and Luke seem to...call for a symbolic or mythical reading. Reading them symbolically seems to be truer to the text than reading them as historical descriptions.” And this was written by so-called Lutheran theologians.

How did Elizabeth react to the Good News of Jesus’ upcoming birth? She heard the Good News and did not use her intellect or reason but humbly, simply believed what the Spirit had revealed to her. How did the unborn baby John react? He leaped for joy at the Good News. Mary was expecting the Son of God by a *miraculous* intervention in the course of nature. The Son of God was implanted into Mary’s womb by the power of the Holy Spirit.

There are certainly different reactions to this Good News in our day as well. As we mentioned some believe it is a myth, or a symbolical picture. Others react with a yawn and a “ho-hum” and really don’t care. While others react to the celebration of the event but not to the event itself and still others ignore it altogether.

It reminds me of the devotion I read the other day that said---“the reaction of a teenager when the shades are drawn and the morning sunrise shines through on a weekday morning is generally rolling over or pulling blankets up to block out the light. While the reaction of young children to the sunrise of Christmas morning will be shouts of joy.”

We pray that our reaction to Jesus’ birth is one of great joy, even after 20, 40, 60, or 80 years of celebrating this Good News year after year. May the Holy Spirit lead us to react as John did, leaping for joy because we too know that Jesus became one of us, a human being, born to live and to die for us in order to save us from our sins.

Our greatest act of service in God’s kingdom this Christmas season may be to do like John the Baptist—to leap for joy and then bear witness to Jesus, our Lord---the simple act of telling another human being that the greatest purpose God has for them is to believe in our Lord Jesus and to know His saving love for us. Too many are missing out on God’s purpose for their lives, and are living with an unfilled hole in their lives and in their soul. And the secular celebration of Christmas is just one example of how we try to fill that hole with all other kinds of things that ultimately won’t satisfy. But having that faith, having the blessing of believing, is a gift of the Holy Spirit that comes by speaking God’s Word.

Mary, Elizabeth, and John the Baptist all had this in common—they heard the Word of God and kept it. By faith they were made willing servants of the Word of God. Both the Word of God in Scripture that promised their Messiah, and the Word of God that was incarnate in Jesus Christ. In Christ they witnessed the miracle of God’s divinity being joined with humanity from His miraculous conception. His life sanctified all of our lives, and His death brings us the forgiveness of all sins. There is no greater blessing or honor than to believe in Him and to be His willing servants. So we join John and Mary and Elizabeth in being messengers of the Good News, that this Jesus is God born in human flesh. That He came once to earth to show His love by His remarkable death on the cross and resurrection from the dead. That He Himself is our peace—this Christmas and forevermore.

Amen.