

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin Eden

Advent 4
Saturday, December 23, 2023, at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, December 24, 2023, at 9:00 a.m.

“My Spirit Rejoices in God my Savior”

Luke 1:26-38

Our Gospel reading today was also the reading for our first Wednesday Advent service as we focused our attention on the town of Nazareth. That evening we turned our attention to what God was thinking by having His Son raised in a tiny little town. As I said, it would be as if we were waiting for the Messiah to come and we hear that He is some guy named Joshua from Big Neck.

Remember Nathaniel’s response when Philip told him that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah that Moses and the prophets had foretold. Nathaniel said, “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” [Jn. 1:46].

Why would God have Him come from there? He should be from Bethlehem and be raised in Jerusalem. But God does not think in the way that we think. And on that first Wednesday of the Advent season, I spoke of God sending His angel to tell this young girl that she will be with child, and the Savior of the world would be born to a girl from Nazareth. Small town; tiny town; ancient world; news of a pregnant girl would not make for an easy life. But, that night, rather than focusing on what the people of Nazareth were thinking about this unwed mother who Joseph still marries, because we know what they were thinking, we took a look at what God was thinking.

Today, we are going to take a look at what the good people of Nazareth were thinking. But we begin with what Mary was thinking. The angel announces the Good News of her finding favor with God, and that she will bear a son who “will be called the Son of the Most High.” She says, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”

Notice her words. Mary knew that this would “be.” She knew that this event would happen. But she didn’t understand how this was going to happen. She trusts what the angel says, “Nothing will be impossible with God.”

This young lady places her full faith and trust in this message of God from the angel. Her life was not going to be the way that she had envisioned it. She was now going to be an unmarried pregnant girl in a society that frowned upon that greatly to say the least – you could even be stoned to death for such an offense. By legal right, Joseph could have brought charges against her.

Her wedding was certainly off. If Joseph was going to marry her, it would have to be done quietly and without celebration. And it would be presumed that he was the father – bringing shame to his family also.

The wedding feast was generally considered the highlight of a person’s life. Especially in poorer families, it was the one time in your life that you could have luxuries. Wedding feasts could last as long as a week. It was the one event that every young girl dreamed about.

All of that was lost. Her family would suffer great shame and embarrassment, and depending upon the arrangement of Mary and Joseph’s wedding plans, Joseph’s father may have even had legal grounds to sue Mary’s

father.

Mary's life was going to change drastically, but she was a young lady who had her priorities straight. She says, "I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." There was no disappointment on her part that her wedding day would be ruined. She doesn't say, "There goes my plans." In faith, she answers the angel and says, "I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."

Her faith and devotion is first and foremost to God. She understands her role as one of God's chosen people. God comes first. Then other priorities fall in line.

We can learn much from the faith of this young lady who willingly gave up the life that she had planned. She willingly gave up her wedding celebration – which would seem to be the most important thing happening in her life at that time. I know what a big deal that would be in my household if all of the wedding plans got canceled. But without hesitation, because of her relationship with God, she receives her calling to be the mother of the Lord. Very often, when we are called to serve, we go willingly, but not always joyfully. Mary says, "My spirit rejoices in God my Savior."

We are urged continually to pray for a willing spirit. We pray "Thy will be done." We are also to pray for a joyful spirit, because life within the church, life within the kingdom is often a very bumpy ride.

In the face of her life changing, Mary's strength was God in whom she trusted. She believed the words of the angel and of the Old Testament that told of

this coming Savior. She trusted in the promises of God. And she knew that whatever difficult circumstances arise as a result of her social status changing, she knew that God would provide for her.

When Christ entered her life, the world's perception of her and her perception of the world completely changed. It's not just that the world would have hated her because of Jesus, but her friends, her family, her neighbors would all have changing opinions of her. Stories would be told. Rumors would fill that little town. Mary (and Joseph) would suffer, yet Mary sings in the Magnificat "My spirit rejoices in God my Savior".

As baptized Christians, forgiven of all our sin, we confess that in thanks to God for that great gift of forgiveness, we would give up everything at a moment's notice for the sake of the Good News of Jesus Christ. That is what we confess with our words, but that is exactly what Mary did through her actions. Without hesitation, she gave up her comfortable plan for her life, so that she could be scorned by the world, but be blessed by God.

That is the burden and the joy she carried with her as she carried that child. Sacrificing certain things in this life so as to be blessed by God is also the burden and joy of all the people of God. We each have a calling, and it has been and will continue to bear a cost. And we pray for a willing spirit to serve the Lord with gladness, so that we may echo Mary's words, "My spirit rejoices in God my Savior." Amen.