

Today's Gospel Reading is from the Book of Luke, Chapter 1 verses 39-55 and can be found on page 1013 of your pew bible.

REJOICE IN OUR SAVIOR

ADVENT 4, DEC. 23: MICAH 5:2-5A // HEBREWS 10:5-10 // LUKE 1:39-55 // PSALM 80:1-7

At St. Timothy's, we gather each week as a people of hope and promise. Henri Nouwen in his devotional, *Bread for the Journey*, reminds us of the differences regarding our modern world concept of optimism and the Lord's concept of hope.

"Optimism and hope are radically different attitudes. Optimism is the expectation that things — the weather, human relationships, the economy, the political situation, and so on—will get better. Hope is trust that God will fulfill God's promises to us in a way that leads us to true freedom. The optimist speaks about concrete changes in the future. The person of hope lives in the moment with the knowledge and trust that all of life is in His good hands."

As we look back to the times of the Old Testament, we see God preparing the people for the coming arrival of his Son, their only hope and promise for a renewed and redeemed life. Throughout Advent, we anticipate the fulfillment of the promises God has made—that he alone would provide His creation with a way to draw nearer to him.

On this side of Jesus' birth, we are a blessed and joyful people because we know we are living out God's plan. Each year we explore God's Word through *Advent* season as we lead up to the birth of Christ. Over the past four weeks, we have recalled and remembered how God's people of old were expecting and yearning for the coming of His salvation, for His son, Jesus.

Advent means *arrival or coming* — Advent is a season not just about recognizing Jesus, but rejoicing in Him. Advent and Christmas are not merely about being watchful, but more meaningfully about being worshipful.

As we journey together through today's texts on the fourth and final week of Advent, we get to revisit the Messianic prophecies of old and rejoice with Elizabeth and Mary at the pending arrival of Jesus Christ, Our Lord and Savior. We also get to look forward to the coming hope of promises fulfilled as we celebrate His birth in a few days and anticipate His second coming in God's timing. We give Him praise, we reflect on His purpose, and we rejoice in His promises!

Revisiting His Prophecy

We learn from the OT prophet, Micah, that the promised Messiah would have a humble beginning as He enters our world. Not as a mighty ruler, but as shepherd king — an infant born of a human mother, conceived by the Holy Spirit, and destined to be the son of God that goes to the Cross. His coming into the world did not align with the visions the religious leaders of the time had — a vision of a mighty king to rule over Israel. God brought Jesus into the world to establish a new world order — that of a servant king.

Micah provides the setting for what would come to light as the birthplace of Jesus. He points us to Bethlehem Ephrathah, meaning “fruitful,” “house of bread.” The coming Savior, about whom Mary sang, we learn came from this small village through the tribe of Judah.

God, in His strength, brought forward a shepherd to reach the ends of the earth – bringing salvation to Israel and the Gentiles who join alongside Abraham’s descendants in proclaiming Jesus as their Lord. We know that every house that is established on His firm foundation is equipped to be fruitful in bringing the bread of life to the world around them.

We learn in the text from Hebrews, that Jesus would become the ultimate sacrifice to atone for the sins of all mankind. No longer would the blood sacrifices be required to wash over our sinful ways. God made clear that the offerings at the temple were ineffective to take away our sin. He alone could provide the means for reconciliation and restoration of His people – for the people of Israel at the time of His birth and for the people of His church today as we await His second coming. The sacrificial law had been set aside by the Gospel truth – we are saved by grace alone. A free gift, a gift born to us in Bethlehem.

Giving Him Praise

As we join in Mary’s visit to Elizabeth in Luke Chapter 1, we are introduced to a psalm of praise that expresses God’s purposes and points to the fulfillment of His promises. We are guided by this hymn on a journey through Mary’s heart and mind as she goes from praise – to purpose – to promise.

We are called to rejoice with her as the Holy Spirit fills us and causes our hearts to leap with the same excitement as John the Baptist leapt in the womb of his mother, Elizabeth. As we go out into the world, Jesus will later call us to the same fervor and same passion that John the Baptist has in proclaiming Christ and making Him known to all who came to him – helping others seek, repent, and turn from their worldly desires. We are called to fulfill His Great Commission with the same humble state that Mary proclaims of the servant in her song.

As Mary enters into the home of Zechariah and Elizabeth, we first see words of praise rise from Elizabeth as she exclaims: *“Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!... ⁴⁵ Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!”* (Luke 1:42-45) In her words of Praise, Elizabeth focuses on the child in Mary’s womb referring to Mary as, *“the mother of my Lord.”*

Luke uses the greek word “kyrios” that is more commonly used to point to Yahweh, himself. This term would carry more importance and significance to a Greek reader than “Messiah” or “Christ.” Before Jesus is even born, the Holy Spirit is making known to Elizabeth and Mary that this child is to be their Lord, and the Lord of all to follow.

Elizabeth in her exclamation points directly to Mary's faith – a faith that is anchored in her belief in the Holy Spirit's calling as the basis of her role in His story. Having anchored her strength of belief and faith in the Word God spoke to her, Mary becomes a vessel to enlighten the world to God's power. Mary is not blessed because God has raised her up to be considered above all other women, rather she is the blessed as she recognizes that she has been raised up from among all the women to receive the special gift she has been given to bear God's son.

Mary and Elizabeth become representatives of God's love for the lowly and humble. Elizabeth asks the Lord, *"but why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"* And Mary says, *"for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant."* God provides us with a two living examples of those who truly magnify the Lord — Elizabeth and Mary. These two women represent for us what it means to acknowledge our lowly estate and to be overwhelmed by the magnificence of God in our daily lives.

Mary launches into a song of praise for God's special blessing and favor that He has shown her as the humble servant to carry His Son and give birth to Him. She gives God the glory and rejoices in the child she calls *"God my Savior."* She assumes a posture of humility as she fully realizes the gift God has given her to bring Jesus into this world. She understands that her own sinful nature is in need of a Savior even as she carries Him in her womb. She expresses for us the understanding that as she gives life to the Son of God, He in turn will give new life to her.

Reflecting on His Purpose

Mary gives us a vivid picture of God's intent: He is going to alter the path that all human history will follow. God chooses two nobodies, two humble women—one aged and unable until now to bear children (Elizabeth), one younger and called to fulfill miracle of the virgin birth (Mary). Mary is so overwhelmed by seeing God's purpose come to life that she breaks into a beautiful Psalm — she begins singing what has become known as "the Magnificat (pr. Mag-nif-i-cat)".

Mary begins to magnify for us what God has done for us. For all of us who stand in awe of the Lord, He gives us mercy. She reminds us that He brings down the proud and arrogant that rule unjustly and treat others poorly. God specifically is seeking to lift up the humble, to fill the hungry, and come alongside the helpless. The Lord turns the world upside-down as he raises up the lowly, the humble, the nobodies of this world to be difference-makers in the lives others.

Rejoicing in His Promise

Mary closes her song with remembrances of God's promises to the people of Abraham. She is fully aware that the child she is carrying is the fulfillment of the covenant promises to Israel. She is rejoicing in the special favor God will restore to His people as He calls them receive their Savior and reconcile in their relationship to Him.

In spite of the people of Israel continually turning away from God, He never turns away from them. He stands alongside them and in His mercy provides a means for His promises to be fulfilled. The means is Jesus, himself, as God brings him into the world through Mary and Joseph – the tribe of Judah, a people of Israel.

Responding with Passion

Advent is a season where we can reflect on the past, considering how those anticipating the promised redemption of God were unsure of what He might do. During this season, we can also look ahead, as we ready our hearts and minds to engage with Jesus at his Second Coming. And for each of us, Advent is also a season of living in the present, a season of participation in sharing His Gospel.

Just as Mary was chosen as an instrument by God to bring Christ into the world. When we come to His manger and see Him as Lord, God calls us to engage those around us by being a light to His message of redemption. God is calling us to see ourselves among the lowly, the humble, the helpless of this world.

In *God is in the Manger*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer reminds us “that is the wonder of all wonders, that God loves the lowly.... God is not ashamed of the lowliness of human beings. God marches right in. He chooses people as his instruments and performs his wonders where one would least expect them. God is near to lowliness; he loves the lost, the neglected, the unseemly, the excluded, the weak and broken.”

He is calling us to lay down our pride fullness and self-centeredness. He is calling us to respond with passion to His calling in the Great Commission to share the reason for the season. To bring others to the child in the manger, to the Christ on the Cross – and in doing so allow the Holy Spirit to let them see the glory of God in the highest!

Let us pray...

Let's sing in response to the message – “Oh Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel” Hymn #34 in your green hymnal.

Let's sing in response to the message – “High and Lifted Up”