

Advent 4
December 20, 2009
Luke 1:39-55
The Rev. Dr. R. K. Miller
Love All

Well, well well... Christmas is almost here. Are you ready? I know it comes at the same time every year but did it not seem to come a little faster this year? When *you* think about Christmas coming this week do you say, "Oh Yes!" Or do you say, "Oh No!" I hope you can say, "Oh yes." I hope the journey to Christmas this year hasn't been too crazy for you. It can get that way for so many of us. The journey of Christmas can be exhausting – emotionally, physically, financially, and even spiritually.

It's easy to get caught up in the Christmas rush in one way or another. The excitement in the air is intoxicating. And the unusual snow-fall yesterday helps to set the mood. Some of us may be here this morning thinking of all those things that we still need to get done -- wondering when you can get to the mall to finish shopping. Me included, by the way.

Some people can't wait until Christmas is over. Wondering why we make such a fuss with all the hoopla. Not me, by the way. I love Christmas. I love all the hoopla. Oh yes! I love the journey of Christmas. Christmas is coming, ready or not!

We're not the only ones who have struggled with the Christmas journey and the Christmas hoopla. In our text from Luke this morning we find people on a journey too. It's a journey of love, a journey of relationships, a journey of celebration.

Let me set the scene. Mary is on her way to see Elizabeth travelling from Nazareth to Judea. It was a long journey -- probably taking a week to walk there. Mary was a month into her pregnancy and traveling alone. It would have been an exhausting journey and dangerous too. Women never travelled alone, especially long distances like that. Yet Mary does.

She is willing to take the risk, to do the unthinkable, to go that extra mile in order to give a gift to someone she loves. Mary can't wait to tell Elizabeth that she is pregnant. Little does Mary know that Elizabeth is pregnant too. Keep in mind Mary needs to return home in six months taking the same long and dangerous journey on foot.

Two women, both pregnant, one very old way past child bearing years, her son (John) will end an old era. The other woman is young, a virgin, her son (Jesus) will usher in the new era.

They both have news to share with someone. But who can they tell? Who would believe them? They both kept their secret to themselves. They share in each other's joyful blessings. See how powerful this visit was.

Mary's presence, and Jesus' presence within her, moves Elizabeth in a way she had not been moved before. Jesus' presence causes a stirring in what was secret and hidden. Jesus gives Elizabeth life. Jesus unlocks Elizabeth's lips, and the first words out of her mouth, amazingly, are not about her! No... She makes a bold proclamation about God's work in the world. Oh yes! Love unlocks the door. God's presence is the gift to Elizabeth, and it causes the Holy Spirit to do its work. What an amazing turn of events! What a gift!

Mary has something to say too. She responds to God's presence speaking not about herself but about God's amazing work in her life. She breaks into song about God and God's greatness in the world.

With that in mind turn with me now to our reading for today, Luke 1:39-55 (Read Luke 1:39-55)

On the one hand Mary's story is not our story. It's hers. On the other hand our story is very much like hers. God has chosen us. God's action toward us is what makes us blessed. We too carry the Savior into the world each one of us in our own way.

God's action is incarnational. God is with us. This is what love is. The Savior is here within us. God has done what God promised to do. We lowly sinful human beings are the recipients of God's favor. Oh yes! Not with silver or gold, but with a person: Jesus. We are blessed with Jesus in our lives! Oh yes!

So what? What does this have to do with us as we travel the Christmas journey this year? Let me suggest four things to help us along the way.

First, be a blessing. You have heard me say this before and it's worth repeating. We are blessed to be a blessing to others. Like Mary and Elizabeth, our blessings are to be shared. When it comes to Jesus we have no secrets to keep.

Last week I offered a challenged for you to buy one less present and give more of your presence to our loved ones. And then share that money with someone who really needs it. I can't tell you how many people thanked me for proposing that idea and helping them to see Christmas in a fresh way.

I am so excited to say that you have come through. As a congregation we are touching the lives of 70 families through our outreach ministry at Luthercare and the giving tree ministry this year providing food for 70 needy families. That's a fantastic way for us to be a blessing to others.

Be a blessing. **Second, be like Jesus** - share the message of God's love with those in need. That's what Jesus did in word and deed. He loved in ways never imagined. Though rich, he became poor to love the poor, the forgotten, the overlooked, and the sick. He played to the margins. By spending less at Christmas, we have the opportunity to join Jesus in giving to those who need help the most.

If you are still looking for a way to share with someone in need. There is still time to Sponsor a child in El Salvador and change a life. Our goal is to provide education this year for 27 children. To date we are able to support 9 children. Check out the announcement in the bulletin and if \$175 is too much then give what the spirit is moving you to share.

Be a blessing. Be like Jesus. **Third, be the messenger** - share the good news.

There seems to be a movement to discourage people from wishing one another a Merry Christmas. “We don’t want to offend anyone so let’s water it down and just say ‘Happy Holidays’.” Hmmmmm. Something seems wrong with this picture to me.

To wish someone a Merry Christmas is the same as proclaiming the “good news of great joy that will be for all people.” Christmas is Good News! It’s a reminder of the Savior’s birth. It’s the prelude story to our salvation. Why should we water down such fantastic news?

Instead of watering down our holiday greetings this year I invite you to say “Merry Christmas” boldly. I’ve been doing that lately -- intentionally -- wherever I go and I love the responses I’ve been getting. Try it!

Be a blessing. Be like Jesus. Be a messenger of great joy. **Finally, be relational.**

Focus not on things this year but on the people God has placed in your life. The gift at Christmas is *you*, not the packages that you bought and wrapped and put under the tree. You are the gift.

Just as Mary was the gift to Elizabeth. And Elizabeth was the gift to Mary. Jesus is God’s gift to the world. God is love, and that love is to be shared. Go then and be the love of God to one and all this week – especially this week. Merry Christmas! Amen.