

Daily Discipleship

Fourth Sunday of Advent – Luke 1:39-55

Imperatives of Discipleship – Rejoice!

Focus Question: *What of Christ brings joy to your life?*

word of life

“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” Luke 1:46 (NRSV)

Read Luke 1:39-55

When Mary hears the news about giving birth to God’s own son, she learns her cousin Elizabeth, an old woman, is also pregnant. “For nothing is impossible with God.” (Luke 1:37) With haste Mary travels to visit her cousin Elizabeth. One can only imagine that conversation. As they are talking, Elizabeth feels her own child leap within her womb and is filled with God’s own Spirit.

1. *Imagine the conversation between Mary and Elizabeth.*
2. *What questions might have gone through Mary’s mind and heart?*

Elizabeth proclaims the obvious, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.” Mary is blessed, not just because she is pregnant with God’s Son, but because of her openness to God at work in her life.

3. *What does it mean to be “blessed”?*
4. *Does blessing mean a pain-free existence? Use the story of Mary to illustrate your answer.*
5. *How is it possible to be blessed, yet still suffer?*

Mary’s spirit soars with the joy over all that has transpired. She sings from the depths of her spirit, attempting to describe the joy of that moment. With humility, she admits her surprise that God would bless such a lowly maiden. It makes no sense to her, but this is God. And God is a Mighty One who does great things – not just for Mary, but for the people of Israel.

6. *Of all women, why Mary?*
7. *Describe Mary. What was she like?*

Mary describes her own spirit as one that magnifies God. This pregnancy is not about Mary. It is about God and the very nature of God. If Mary is a woman of love, it is because God is love. If Mary is a woman of inner peace, it is God who gives her peace.

8. *What does it mean to magnify God?*
9. *Who else in the Bible magnifies God?*

Mary understands God as one who favors the lowly, does great things, and is holy. God’s mercy invites people from generation to generation to respect and honor God. Time and time, God remembers Israel and call for acts of justice. Mary’s faith reflects the goodness of God. She trusts God because of the ways God has worked in her life and the life of her ancestors.

She might not expect God to select her to be an instrument of the long-awaited Messiah, but she expects God to fulfill promises made to Abraham and her ancestors. Her shock is not because God chose to act, but rather in God’s selection of herself, a lowly servant to give birth to Jesus.

10. *What is worth remembering from this story?*

word among us

Many congregations invite children and youth to participate in an annual Christmas pageant. Young shepherds get to wear bathrobes and place colorful towels on their heads. Angels adorn their backs with wings and sparkling gold garlands on their heads. Some lucky girl portrays Mary and holds a favorite doll wrapped in a blanket. Now and then, a cow or sheep makes it on the stage.

Throughout it all, grandparents sigh deeply as they watch the story of faith being passed to the next generation.

1. *Take a moment to share a memory from a Christmas pageant.*
2. *How is Mary usually portrayed in Christmas pageants?*

Some girls shy away from portraying Mary because she is so special. There is no doubt Mary embodied unmerited grace. Martin Luther writes,

Now, we described above at length how lowly was the estate of this tender Virgin and how unexpectedly this honor came to her, that God should regard her in such abundant grace. Hence she does not glory in her worthiness nor yet in her unworthiness, but solely in the divine regard, which is so exceedingly good and gracious that he deigned to look upon such a lowly maiden, and to look upon her in so glorious and honorable a fashion...For not her humility but God's regard is to be praised. When a prince takes a poor beggar by the hand, it is not the beggar's lowliness but the prince's grace and goodness that is to be commended. (Luther Works Vol. 21, p. 314)

If we want to learn about being a disciple, we don't have to look much further than Mary, the mother of Jesus. Her response is a model for anyone seeking to follow God. Mary is willing to serve, to give God glory, and to witness to God's mighty deeds. Mary does not claim center stage, but points to God. Like John the Baptist, she points to one who is greater than herself.

3. *What other characteristics of discipleship can be seen in Mary?*
4. *What of Mary might we incorporate in our own lives?*
5. *How might we point to Jesus Christ?*
6. *Create your own Magnificat, your own praise to God. Begin with the phrase, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." Then add those things God has done in your life for which you rejoice. It need not be sung, but can be written down on paper. (Do this as a personal devotion or as part of a group process.)*

Prayer

Mighty One, our souls desire to magnify you. Lift our voices and spirits so we might clearly point to you and bear witness to your greatness. Amen.

Dig Deeper

Luke 1:67-80

last word

Begin each day
offering a prayer to magnify the Lord
and for Christ's coming.



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