

**“Here I Am the Servant of the Lord”**

Luke 1: 26-55

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**The Joy experienced at Christmas time.** We all have moments leading up to Christmas where we feel a sense of joy. Hearing the Christmas carols in church and in shopping malls definitely helps most of us get into the holiday mood. We may be feeling a sense of joyful relief that we have completed all our Christmas shopping on time. Some would say that ‘no drama’ with the family at Christmas dinner would constitute a joyful Christmas.

In the context of our story today we come to the root of Christmas Joy. It begins with Mary being told by the angel Gabriel, “*Do not be afraid (Luke 1:30).*” She was called by God to be the mother of Jesus!

**The Magnificat or ‘Song of Mary’:** In obedience to the call from God to be the mother of the saviour of the world, Mary first responded to the Angel Gabriel with the following words in bold (and later in our scripture reading with the song - ‘The Magnificat’).

***Then Mary said, “Here I am the servant of the Lord: let it be to me according to your word (verse 38).”*** Gabriel appeared to Mary and stated God’s life altering plan for both Mary and Elizabeth. Then Gabriel said to Mary, “*Nothing is impossible with God*”. Immediately after this last statement, Mary gave her acceptance of God’s plan for her life. Though Mary consented, she still needed to see her cousin Elizabeth in order to get an affirmation about all that would be happening to her.

The news Mary received from Gabriel was literally unbelievable though she accepted it in faith! Of course, she needed to tell someone, and the angel told her who she could safely tell. She could not just tell anyone because who would understand? She could not tell her husband, her family - how would they believe such a fairy tale kind of story? But she needed to tell someone- to have someone not judge her, have someone who understands, who knows the truth and who can support her! Elizabeth played a vital role in Mary being able to live with, and have joy about the news of the new plan from God for her life!

Something happens when people meet to encourage one another. I believe that in the context of encouragement we open up the opportunity for the Holy Spirit to work healing and joy into one another’s lives. The meeting between a young teenager Mary and Mary’s relative Elizabeth is well known to Christians. Numerous paintings and sculptures had been crafted depicting the meeting of these two women.

***When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb (verses 41, 42).”***

Confirmation of the plan was certainly made clear in Elizabeth’s heart and then in the heart of Mary as well. Mary decided to listen to the Lord and not count the costs.

**What was the source of Mary's Joy?** But why does Mary sing? Mary sings for good reason similar to Hannah, the mother of Samuel when she was blessed with a child (1 Samuel 2). Both of these women are motivated to sing because of God's mercy for the humble. They are thankful that God is not impressed by pride, with riches, or with power. They are also filled with joy because God keeps his promises and God's mercy (God's gracious love) is the means by which His Kingdom comes. Mary is told that Jesus' Kingdom will last – it will have no end!

Mary is honoured to be the mother of Jesus and be a servant of God in the fulfillment of God's promise of the coming Messiah. God's plan for her was so awesome and filled her with joy, but she knew the way ahead to be very difficult. Mary knew the right thing to do, but the consequences were not pretty.

Women in the days of Jesus' birth were not considered to have important status. They had slightly more status than that of a slave. Their testimony was not regarded in the court of law. A man was considered much more valuable than a woman. Just to be a woman made one vulnerable, but to be a young woman, unmarried and pregnant was a road to a very difficult life of vulnerability, scorn and shame. Yet, this is the context to which the mother of the Messiah was told by the angel Gabriel that the Son of God was to be born!

Mary was facing a time of chaos and scorn in her life because she was pregnant. For Elizabeth's entire life until she was in her 80's, she was sterile and felt inadequate because she could not produce children. Also, there was political chaos because these women and their people lived in a territory controlled by the Roman forces. Under these conditions the Israelite people endured poverty and brutality. There was chaos because as women they were in a vulnerable position within a minority people in society. However, the Holy Spirit came and brought chaos to order in their lives.

**The joy of Christmas carried into the New Year.** Doing the right thing can make one's life difficult. For example, everyone would agree that the armoured vehicles produced in London at General Dynamics do not contribute to health and healing of the world. Actually these vehicles are used to cause pain, suffering and death to innocent people in Yemen. The implications are that if the Canadian Government puts a stop on selling these vehicles to Saudi Arabia, thousands of people will be out of work and it will cause hardship for those families. As followers of Christ, the Messiah, we are to be people of peace and are called to love one another as the Lord has loved us (John 15: 12). Every life is equally important – we are all made in the image of God! As a congregation, we are called to serve God and others. Sometimes the costs are high to our way of life, and these decisions directly affect some much more than others. When the way of Christ's love and justice is chosen, we are to help by serving and encouraging others whose lives will change because of this decision. Similar to how Mary was encouraged by Elizabeth, we are to encourage one another to be obedient to God's call in spite of the costs. In one voice, in line with Mary's words-- as people rooted in the Joy found in our saviour Jesus, let us say together, *"Here I am the servant of the Lord: let it be to me according to your word."* Amen.