

Sermon Luke 1 26 56 3rd Sunday in Advent

Sermon: 3rd Sunday in Advent

Text: Luke 1:26-56 (v. 46)

Theme: From fright to joyfulness

Goal: God comes to our aid when we are frightened

Dear Friends,

Introduction: When we are taken unaware by an unexpected visit of a friend or a relative, our first reaction is the surprise: *What are you doing here? What is happening? Where have you come from?* - But immediately our question marks change into a great happiness, even with tears of joy mixed with laughing. And we hug and kiss the beloved one who came to visit us.

Even when something bad happens to us, like a car accident or something similar; our first reaction is of fright and scare. But after all have passed, we laugh and thank God that we are alive.

This was the reaction of Virgin Mary when the angel appeared to her: First, she was greatly troubled, perplexed and confused; but eventually she became very happy and rejoiced in the Lord, singing a beautiful song of praise to her Saviour!

I – The origin of Advent Season

From the very beginning till recent days, Advent was a penitential and fasting time. Even nowadays many churches follow this old tradition, using purple for the altar cloths, and highlighting the message of repentance of John the Baptist and the second coming of Jesus for judgment. Only from the third Sunday in Advent on the churches begin to highlight the joy of Christmas, the coming of the Saviour, who forgives our sins and reconciles us with God. This third Sunday in Advent is also called Gaudate (in Latin), that means: Rejoice! More recently some churches are changing the Advent

colour to blue as a sign of hope and happiness. And as Advent Services are not held during the week any more in most of the churches, the preparation for a Christian Christmas happens at the Sunday Services, remembering the promises and the events that preceded the birth of Jesus.

Today's readings present the reason for the true Christmas joy. Prophet Zephaniah (3:14-20) says: "Sing... shout aloud... Be glad and rejoice with all your heart. The Lord has taken away your punishment. The Lord, your God, is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing." Paul wrote to the Philippians (4:4, 5): "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say again: Rejoice! The Lord is near."

II – The Advent of the Messiah

The promises of the Old Testament filled the faithful people with hope and expectation. *When will the Messiah come? How will it be?* As it took a long time since the last Prophet had spoken (around 400 years), many lost their hope and their faith. But some were still waiting for the accomplishment of the promises. Zachariah and Elizabeth were among them; Joseph and Mary as well; and many others. Therefore, when the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, first she was greatly troubled. But as a faithful woman, after a while she understood what was happening, as the angel explained her God's plan.

Knowing that it is not common for someone to see an angel and that Mary would get a fright, Gabriel came in a very soft way, assuring Mary that he was coming in peace: "Greetings, you who highly favoured! The Lord is with you." After the first shock of Mary, the angel said: "Don't be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God."

You will be with a child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name of Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

Mary didn't doubt the words of the angel. She knew what the angel was talking about: The Messiah was coming and she was chosen by God to be the blessed mother of the Son of God. Finally the prophesy was beginning to come true. – The only question she raised was "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" And the angel explained her how the miraculous pregnancy by the power of the Holy Spirit would happen.

Mary accepted her task with humbleness and willingness: "I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled."

III – The joy of the Advent of the Messiah

We come now to the happiness and joy of two women who are contagious and who show the real reason for Christmas joy.

"At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea" in the South, to meet Elizabeth, who was in her sixth month of pregnancy, expecting John the Baptist. The reaction of Elizabeth to this unexpected visit is worthy to be shared again: "When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favoured, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfil his promises to her!"

Not only Elizabeth rejoiced with the visit of Mary, but the baby in her womb leaped for joy! – What about people who say that a foetus is not yet a human being? John was still being formed in the womb of his mother, but he expressed his sentiments of joy when he heard the voice of the mother of the Saviour.

And then we have the great song of joy that Mary sang, known as The Magnificat, exalting the Almighty God and confessing her faith in her Saviour, whom she was carrying in her womb: “My soul glorifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour!” And she goes on remembering God’s promises and praising Him for His faithfulness sending the Messiah.

Conclusion: We have many reasons to be happy and to rejoice at Christmas time. It’s a festive season all around us. The shops, streets and houses have special decorations with many lights; families come together either to our homes, or we go to visit our beloved ones; we prepare special food, cookies and cakes; and we share gifts and we rejoice with the children shining eyes when they receive their gifts... These all are good reasons for joy; but not only this: The reason for all this festive season joy is only one: Christ, the Saviour is born. We celebrate Christmas around Christ, and not just around Season Holidays.

Let the true joy of the coming of Christ as a babe in the manger; of the coming of Christ as the Saviour in His Word and in the Holy Communion due to His sacrifice on the cross for us; and of the coming of Christ as our King at the end of the times be the real reason of our joy and happiness this Christmas. - “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say again: Rejoice! The Lord is near... And the peace of God, who transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:4, 7). Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle, Cape Town, 13 December 2015