

Sermon Luke 1 39 56 4<sup>th</sup> S in Advent 1Yseries

Sermon: 4th Sunday in Advent

Text: Luke 1:39-56 (vv.44,45)– Mary visits Elizabeth

Theme: The believers rejoice at the Savior's coming.

Goal: Christmas' joy is a gift of God to the believers

Dear Friends,

Introduction: When abortion becomes as common as an appendix operation, and several countries are making laws liberating it, we face a text that talks about two fetuses who had names, a goal for their lives, and they were the accomplishment of God's promises: John the Baptist, who was six months old in the womb of his mother Elizabeth; and Jesus, who was only some weeks old in the womb of His mother Mary – maybe less than a month old. How can people argue that a fetus can be aborted before three months of pregnancy, or some even when it is 8 months old? God acknowledges life from the time of the conception and every life is precious to Him! Only a woman who had the experience of a pregnancy and has the child in her arms can fully understand this.

The dialogue between Elizabeth and Mary focuses on the two babies to be, and on God's enormous grace and love bringing these two baby boys to the world as the summit of His salvation plan for humankind: our salvation!

I – The happiness of Elizabeth

Elizabeth was not expecting Mary's visit. It was a big surprise for her when she heard the voice of her cousin entering her home. We can only understand Elizabeth's reaction because she "was filled with the Holy Spirit", who revealed to her what was happening and who was the baby in the womb of Mary: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, 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 fulfill his promises to her!”

Not only Elizabeth rejoiced, but even John in her womb “leaped for joy”! The child had feelings and reactions! - What was the reason for this joy? It was the coming of their Saviour, Jesus, even though Jesus was still less than a month old fetus. -

Elizabeth confessed: “The mother of my LORD!” She recognized in that child to be born her LORD – God Himself coming to her - the accomplishment of the faith and hope of people of the Old Covenant.

The coming of Jesus brings joy. This is the real joy of Christmas. We have many other reasons to rejoice at Christmas: Family reunion, travels, gifts, special food... But this all pass some days after Christmas. But Jesus remains. This is the core of our faith and the core of our Christian Christmas! And this is a joy that only believers can have, as Elizabeth said: “Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said.” – We will speak more about faith when we quote Luther later.

## II – The happiness of Mary

Mary was also surprised with the unexpected welcome and the words of her cousin. And as a response to Elizabeth’s greetings, she also acknowledged the baby in her womb, calling Him “God my Saviour”. She said: “My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.” It’s amazing to see the faith and happiness of these two women, one a teenager, and the other one maybe over 50. They are happy not only because both have been chosen by God to bear these special children, but they are happy because God eventually sent the promised Saviour! They were celebrating “Christmas” with the real joy that comes from God and is a fruit of our faith.

III – Only believers can rejoice in God

The Epistle Reading for today, Philippians 4:4-7, matches this true joy when it says: “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say again: Rejoice!” Martin Luther wrote a nice comment on this true joy: *This joy is a fruit and result of faith, as it says, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, chastity” (Gal. 5:22-23). It is impossible for a heart to rejoice in God which does not first believe in Him. Where there is no faith, there is only fear, fight, timidity, and sorrow as soon as God is even thought of or named; indeed, there is hatred and enmity toward God in such hearts. The reason for this is that the heart finds itself guilty in its conscience and has no confidence that God is gracious and favorable, since it knows that God is the enemy of sin and horribly punishes it... for the (nonbelievers) feel the hand of God pressing on their conscience. Therefore, the prophet says, “Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, o righteous, and boast, all you godly people!” (Psalm 32:11). It is the just and the righteous who are to rejoice in the Lord. Therefore, this Epistle was not written for sinners, but for saints. The sinners must first be told how to be freed from their sins and receive a gracious God; then the joy will follow of itself when they are freed from their evil conscience.*

*But how does one get free from an evil conscience and receive a gracious God? I answer: ... Whoever would have a good conscience and find a gracious God must not begin with works, as the deceivers do, who still further torment hearts and increase hatred for God. Rather, he must despair of all works, apprehend God in Christ, grasp the Gospel, and believe what it promises.*

*When this correct faith in the Gospel is in the heart, then to him God becomes sweet and loving. Then the heart feels nothing but favor and grace in all kinds of confidence and is unafraid of his punishment; it is secure and in good spirit because God has given*

*it superabundant grace and goodness in Christ. Therefore, such faith must result in love, joy, peace, singing, thanking and praising; he then has a completely heartfelt delight toward God, as toward his dearest and most gracious Father, who deals with him in such a fatherly way and, without any merit of his own, abundantly pours out His goodness on him.* (Phil Brandt, pp. 32,33).

Conclusion: We all have many reasons for sadness and sorrows: personal problems, family issues, health concerns, doubts, unemployment.... For some, Christmas is not a happy day, and they become depressed. But the witness of these two women of our Gospel focuses our eyes not on the problems, but on the solution: The Saviour has come, sent by the Father of love. Maybe many of our issues and concerns will not be solved in our life time. Some will become even worst. But we have hope and a Saviour who loves us. The celebrating of His coming lifts our eyes to a higher level than just the dust that surrounds us: To the glory of a God that came in a manger to become our brother, and who suffered much more than anyone of us, so that we can go with Him to the heavenly mansions that the Father has prepared for us.

The miracle of God's love has been renewed today again as little Rourke was baptized. Just water and some words is the way God has chosen to receive children into His family and His Kingdom. We rejoice with the Van Dijk family for this gift of God. God loves the children from the time they are conceived and He rejoices when parents bring their children to Him to be baptized and to be taught about His love for them. - Let us rejoice at this Christmas again with Elizabeth, Mary and the whole Christian Church from the past, present and future in Christ: God, our Saviour. Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle, Cape Town, 18 December 2016

