Sun., Dec. 12 - 3rd Sunday of Advent

Memory Verse: "Blessed is the one who believed that the Lord would fulfill the promises He made to them." -Luke 1:45
Reading of Scripture: Luke 1:39-56
Message: "The Coming: Magnify & Bless"
Scripture: Luke 1:57-80
Blurb: Christmas is a season of joy. We hear that a lot. But why? Why are we filled with joy? It doesn't come from presents or parties or celebrations. This Sunday we again read from Luke 1, where we hear why there is true joy at Christmas...and we are told 19 times!
Bulletin listing of the reading for next week: Luke 2:1-20

[Recorded Worship Beginning]

WELCOME -Pastor Andrew

MEMORY VERSE: -Pastor Andrew

"Blessed is the one who believed that the Lord would fulfill the promises He made to them." -Luke 1:45

WORSHIP MUSIC SET -Sanctify

Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus Sing We the Song of Emmanuel Worship prayer -Pastor Andrew

[Live Worship Beginning]

GATHERING SONG: Everlasting God -Sanctify

WELCOME -Pastor David

MEMORY VERSE: -Pastor David

"Blessed is the one who believed that the Lord would fulfill the promises He made to them." -Luke 1:45

WORSHIP MUSIC SET -Sanctify

O Come All Ye Faithful Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus Sing We the Song of Emmanuel Worship prayer -Pastor Andrew

READING OF SCRIPTURE / ADVENT CANDLE: Luke 1:39-56

We continue reading the Christmas story in Luke chapter 1, when the now pregnant Mary goes to visit her pregnant relative, Elizabeth. As we read, please take your hymnal and turn to page #199. Our reading includes Mary's response to seeing Elizabeth. It's called the Canticle of Mary, or The Magnificat, from the first word in Latin for "magnify." We will read it responsively when we come to it in the reading today. Again, your hymnal page #199. Luke 1:39-56,

"39 Mary got up and hurried to a city in the Judean highlands. 40 She entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42 With a loud voice she blurted out, "God has blessed you above all women, and he has blessed the child you carry. 43 Why do I have this honor, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 As soon as I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy. 45 Blessed is she who believed that the Lord would fulfill the promises He made to her."

So now, we pick it up on page #199. "Mary said,"

[Read the light-printed text from "Canticle of Mary" *UMH*#199. The people read the bold-printed text, responsively.]

56 Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months, and then returned to her home.

SERVE MOMENT: Hope Moves Christmas Party Food Shelf Collection

PRAYERS: "The Canticle of Zechariah" (Benedictus) UMH#209 - Pastor Andrew

Turn in your hymnals to page #208. The first thing Zechariah said, after ten months of silence, is a prayer of blessing for Jesus and his son John. We join with Zechariah by making this prayer our Christmas prayer today. Turn to page #208 and pray this with me responsively.

"John's father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied,"

[Pray The "Canticle of Zechariah" UMH#208 responsively.]

Oh Lord, we make this our Christmas prayer, too. "Bless be the Lord, the God of Israel, who has come to set the chosen people free." Amen.

GENERATIONAL BRIDGE: Video ("Gius") -Pastor Andrew

MESSAGE: The Coming: Magnify & Bless

PP#1: The Coming: Magnify & Bless

"Because of our God's deep compassion, the dawn from heaven will break upon us, to give light to those who are sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide us on the path of peace." -Luke 1:78-79

The Coming: Magnify & Bless. Luke 1:78-79, "Because of our God's deep compassion, the dawn from heaven will break upon us, to give light to those who are sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide us on the path of peace."

PP#2: *Image of Luke on one side, and on the other side, these 3 points:*

Luke:

-His Gospel is a letter to Theophilus -Telling a spiritual (salvation) biography of Jesus -To establish confidence in Jesus

So, we're heading into Christmas by joining Luke, as he tells us the story of Jesus in his Gospel. Luke came to know Jesus after Jesus had returned to heaven. He is a Gentile, and a physician.

[Point to flip chart from the previous week -

Luke: Spiritual biography Researched Historical Explains Jewish stuff Salvation also for non-Jews Biology]

Luke is researched, historical, as a non-Jew he explains Jewish stuff, and he really wants to show how God's salvation is not just for Jews but also intended for the whole world: for non-Jews, like us! And as a physician, he's thinking scientifically and includes details and biological concerns.

Luke's purpose is to share the *spiritual* biography of Jesus, so that what he tells us about Jesus helps us see that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the Savior sent by God to save ALL people. This is why Luke includes a lengthy birth story. Luke sees that *how* Jesus was born also shares *how* God's salvation is brought to all people. Luke is including parts that Mark and Matthew had omitted, probably because Mark was being brief and Matthew was writing to Jews.

PP#3: The Coming - Foretold:

- 1. God is Coming
- 2. Joy is breaking out
- 3. The Holy Spirit is the main Actor
- 4. Salvation has begun!

So, Luke embeds Jesus' birth story inside the miraculous story of John's birth. Dare I say it? Luke *impregnates* John's birth story with Jesus'! He does it because John's birth offers proof that Jesus is born as the promised Messiah, the promised Savior. We see in John's story that God is indeed coming. Joy is breaking out. The Holy Spirit is active and busy, and that the main movement of God's salvation for humankind has begun.

PP#4: The Gospel Message in Luke 1:

1:13, "Don't be afraid. God has heard you." God is coming to help.

1:25 "This is the Lord's doing. He has shown favor."

1:28 "Rejoice, favored one! The Lord is with you!"

1:30 "Don't be afraid. God is honoring you."

1:37 "Nothing is impossible for God."

Within the first 40 verses, we've heard the good news of the gospel summarized five times! "Don't be afraid. God has heard you." He's coming to help. "This is the Lord's doing. He has shown favor." So, "Rejoice, favored one! The Lord is with you!" "Don't be afraid. God is honoring you." And the granddaddy of them all, "Nothing is impossible for God!" Hallelujah! Amen!

So, Elizabeth in her "very old" age is miraculously pregnant with a boy named John. He is the forerunner, in the Spirit and power of Elijah, to announce the coming of the Savior. Mary is miraculously pregnant, as a virgin, with God's very son. Her Jesus is fully human and fully divine. He will be the Savior.

PP#5: Luke 1:39-80 (CEB)

39 Mary got up and hurried to a city in the Judean highlands. 40 She entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42 With a loud voice she blurted out, "God has blessed you above all women, and he has blessed the child you carry. 43 Why do I have this honor, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 As soon as I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy. 45 Blessed is she who believed that the Lord would fulfill the promises He made to her."

So, we pick up the story in Luke 1:39. I again encourage you to bring your own Bibles to worship. We're going to make notes as we read. Turn to Luke 1:39. We enter the story as young Mary is heading out the door. She's pregnant, and she's not married. People will talk, and wonder...especially her finance, Joseph, right?

So, she heads to her relative's house, Elizabeth, because the angel Gabriel told her to verify the miracle with her. Trust but verify. Sounds like a physician talking!

Now, verse 41 is important because we see how even before the two boys are born, their relationship is already set. John, who is to announce the coming of the Savior, jumps in Elizabeth's womb the moment that the pregnant Mary walks into the door. Already we know that the unborn Jesus is verified as the Savior! Elizabeth is full-on believer, right? Verse 43, she verifies that Mary is the biological mother of the Lord. Wow! No suspenseful, drawn-out mystery here for Luke, is there? He starts out the whole story: "By the way, just so you know for certain up front, Jesus is the Christ, God's Son, the Savior of the world." And, notice the word "joy" again. It's all over Luke's Christmas story. Underline it in verse 44. If you missed it last Sunday, go back and underline it in verse 14, and also the word "rejoice" there in verse 14 and also in verse 28.

Elizabeth knows that Mary is blessed, because she obviously believed the angel, for she is now pregnant. Amazing faith from such a young girl, perhaps 14 or 15. Wow.

Well, this could be all the sermon we need for Christmas, right here! "Blessed is the one who believes that the Lord would fulfill the promises He made to them." In the margins of your Bible, drawing a line to verse 45, write down, "We need to believe, too!" We've made this our memory verse for this week, so we can remember it over and over again all during Christmas. This is the gift of Christmas: blessing when we believe God fulfills His promises to us. When we believe in Jesus, the blessing of salvation is the gift we open from God at Christmas!

PP#6: Luke 1:39-80 (CEB)

46 Mary said, "With all my heart I glorify the Lord! 47 In the depths of who I am I rejoice in God my savior. 48 He has looked with favor on the low status of His servant. Look! From now on, everyone will consider me highly favored 49 because the Mighty One has done great things for me. Holy is His name. 50 He shows mercy to everyone, from one generation to the next, who honors Him as God. 51 He has shown strength with His arm. He has scattered those with arrogant thoughts and proud inclinations. 52 He has pulled the powerful down from their thrones and lifted up the lowly. 53 He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty-handed. 54 He has come to the aid of His servant Israel, remembering His mercy, 55 just as He promised to our ancestors, to Abraham and to Abraham's descendants forever."

Now, Mary bursts out in song as her response. Music is all over the Christmas story, right? For us, too! One of the best parts of Christmas is the carols we sing. I'm talking those deep, religious carols, full of the story of real Christmas. Something so amazing as the birth of the Savior is too good for mere words. The words swell up in our hearts, and our whole being is captivated. And so, the full-body expression comes out in song, and I imagine: Mary and Elizabeth dancing together in joy as Mary sings, as was the Jewish way.

Your Bibles probably keep the poetic form of this section. To it's side, write "song" so we can notice all the music in the Christmas story.

But see the Gospel message here again in this song! Underline "rejoice" in verse 47. Here's the gospel: "I rejoice in God my savior." And in verse 48, "He has looked with favor even when He sees the low–undeserving–status of His people." Again in verse 49, "The Mighty One has done great things for me." "Holy is His name!" Say that with me, "Holy is His name!" We join with Mary–say it again, "Holy is His name!" On Christmas day, when singing Christmas carols, say it again: "Holy is His name!" Make sure that stays on your lips this Christmas.

The good news is that "He shows mercy to everyone." We'll come back to this in a second. Verse 51: Our Savior is strong and mighty–remember He's the mighty Lion of the Tribe of Judah! Verse 52, He reorders the powers of this world, the strong and arrogant He scatters, and lifts up the lowly. Here is part of the reason for why Christmas is hope and peace to our embittered world. God reorders His world, getting it back to His way. He calls His people to a different way of living. God feeds the hungry. Jesus will later reveals that He is the Bread of life!

Verse 54 is the gospel again, "He has come to the aid of His people." Why? Because they deserve it? Because they are worthy? Because they are clean and pure and holy? No! They are just the opposite. It is only because of His mercy! He remembers NOT Israel's sins and failures. Our God remembers His mercy. We have been adopted in as Abraham's descendants! So, our God, when He comes in Jesus as our Savior, earns our forgiveness, removes our sins. And therefore He does not remember *our* sins, *our* failures, *our* bad past, *our* baggage, *our* "history." Because of Jesus, God remembers *His* mercy, how *He* is forgiving, and saving. This is Christmas! We've heard the gospel message a dozen times already here in Luke, and Jesus isn't even born yet! Can you see the swelling of good news here? It's more than words can express! Can you let it overwhelm you? Can you take it in, deep down inside? Can you erupt in song as you proclaim how awesome our God is? Hallelujah! "Holy Is *His* name!" Merry Christmas! Perhaps you need to dance and sing this Christmas!

Verse 55, "Just as He promised." Jesus is the Savior. He is the fulfillment of all the prophecies. Luke, although a non-Jew, makes a point to draw connections back to Abraham to prove that Jesus is not a johnny-come-lately, a new idea. He doesn't appear out of nowhere. This is actually, he's saying, the fulfillment of ancient prophecy. Jesus' birth has context: in history, 1. in geography (location) and 2. in prophecy. It's fulfillment. It's all coming together! Orderly.

PP#7: Luke 1:39-80 (CEB)

56 Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months, and then returned to her home.

57 When the time came for Elizabeth to have her child, she gave birth to a boy. 58 Her neighbors and relatives celebrated with her because they had heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy. 59 On the eighth day, it came time to circumcise the child. They wanted to name him Zechariah because that was his father's name. 60 But his mother replied, "No, his name will be John."

Mary and Elizabeth have a party, for three months! Mary, being supported and filled, can now go back home and face the village. By now, Mary is showing. She knows people will talk...and what about Joseph? Well, God takes care of that. Matthew had already told that story, back in Matthew 1. When Joseph sees Mary pregnant, he's shocked and plans to call everything off. But God sent the angel Gabriel to him, too. He becomes her strongest ally and protector. Draw an arrow pointing between verse 56 and verse 57 and write, "Insert Matthew 1:18-25."

Luke, however, orderly physician and verifying researcher, goes back to Elizabeth to make sure we understand that it all actually did work out the way it was set up. Verse 57, "When the time came for Elizabeth to have her child, she gave birth to a boy. 58 Her neighbors and relatives celebrated with her because they had heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy." Underline "celebrated" because in the original Greek, the word is "rejoiced." But see? No longer a secret! Others are blessed when we are blessed. The blessing spills out onto others.

But what about poor, mute Zechariah? Ooo, there's good stuff here, too! Let's keep going! Verse 59, "On the eighth day, it came time to circumcise the child. [Jewish covenant rite.] They wanted to name him Zechariah because that was his father's name. [As one did.] 60 But his mother replied, "No, his name will be John."

PP#8: Luke 1:39-80 (CEB)

61 They said to her, "None of your relatives have that name." 62 Then they began gesturing to his father to see what he wanted to call him.

63 After asking for a tablet, he surprised everyone by writing, "His name is John." 64 At that moment, Zechariah was able to speak again, and he began praising God.

65 All their neighbors were filled with awe, and everyone throughout the Judean highlands talked about what had happened. 66 All who heard about this considered it carefully. They said, "What then will this child be?" Indeed, the Lord's power was with him.

I don't think this is a case here of not respecting Elizabeth. I think it's a natural reaction to go and ask the other parent, too, when diverging from strong tradition. And this is important for the story of salvation, Luke notices, because now Zechariah is offered the opportunity to testify. Remember, he had doubted the angel, right? Well, what's he saying now? Has the Christmas story changed him? Remember, we are a lot like Zechariah. And, Luke wants to be sure we hear: Christmas has indeed changed him! Verse 61, "They said to [Elizabeth, but] 'None of your relatives have that name.' 62 Then they began gesturing to his father to see what he wanted to call him. [Remember, he's still mute.] 63 After asking for a tablet, he surprised everyone by writing, 'His name is John.' 64 At that moment, Zechariah was able to speak again, and he began praising God."

So, Zechariah is now on board with the angel and what God is doing. He gets his voice back. And how does he use it? He praises God. More singing and dancing, right?

Verse 65, "All their neighbors were filled with awe, and everyone throughout the Judean highlands talked about what had happened. 66 All who heard about this considered it carefully. They said, 'What then will this child be?' Indeed, the Lord's power was with him." Again, all those around "get blessed on." Everyone around knows that God is up to something in this boy John. What is it? We'll see in a couple of chapters when John, as a respected prophet, points to Jesus and says, "There's the Messiah!"

And yes, the Holy Spirit was with John, the first human that God's Spirit *lived in*. John marks the change from the old order, the old covenant, the Old Testament, where God's Spirit *came on* people here and there, for special times and purposes, to the new order, the New Testament, where God's Spirit now comes and *lives within* God's people, continually!

PP#9: Luke 1:39-80 (CEB)

67 John's father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied,

68 "Bless the Lord God of Israel because He has come to help and has delivered His people. 69 He has raised up a mighty savior for us in His servant David's house, 70 just as He said through the mouths of His holy prophets long ago. 71 He has brought salvation from our enemies and from the power of all those who hate us.

Next to verse 68, again write "Song." We're tracking the music of Christmas.

We call Zechariah's song, "The Canticle of Zechariah," or by it's Latin name, "Benedictus," which is the first word of his song, "bless." Verse 67, "John's father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, 68 'Bless the Lord God of Israel because He has come to help and has delivered His people. 69 He has raised up a mighty savior for us in His servant David's house, 70 just as He said through the mouths of His holy prophets long ago. 71 He has brought salvation from our enemies and from the power of all those who hate us."

Again, the Holy Spirit is the active Agent at work, notice. And He leads Zechariah to lead all the people in blessing God. Here is our right response to the good news of what God is doing: to bless God! "Holy is His name!" Again, here is a declaration of the Gospel: "He has come to help and deliver His people." The savior is mighty!—the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, right?—and King of Kings in the royal line of King David. All this is verified, as the prophets foretold it long before. He brings salvation and breaks the power of evil and hate. Wow! We need this Savior right now, don't we?

So, Zechariah was talking about Mary's Son, soon to be born. Write a bracket for verses 68-75, and write "About Jesus" in the margin. Zechariah begins by talking about the Savior. He's on board! He's figured out what's happening! John's birth points to Jesus in every way!

PP#10: Luke 1:39-80 (CEB)

72 He has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and remembered His holy covenant, 73 the solemn pledge He made to our ancestor Abraham. He has granted 74 that we would be rescued from the power of our enemies so that we could serve Him without fear, 75 in holiness and righteousness in God's eyes, for as long as we live.

Verse 72...again, this is about Jesus: "72 He has shown the mercy [again with the mercy!] promised to our ancestors, and remembered His holy covenant, 73 the solemn pledge He made to our ancestor Abraham." Here is a key theme about salvation: it's the fulfillment of the ancient covenant. Do you remember what that covenant was...from the Old Testament? It was 1. That God would be the God of His people, and 2. That the people would be God's people. It's the relationship

between God and His people, the abundant, life-giving relationship. And God acts to restore that covenant, to repair it, to reactivate it. Verse 74, "He has granted 74 that we would be rescued from the power of our enemies so that we could serve Him without fear, 75 in holiness and righteousness in God's eyes, for as long as we live."

Ah, here is the result of Christmas, the what salvation looks like. We are rescued, not to be free to go our own way and do everything our way, but freed to do things God's way: key difference! In verse 75 draw a line to "holiness and righteousness" and write in your margin, "our purpose." This is why we are saved. It's not just a momentary thing: we are called to holiness "as long as we live!"

PP#11: Luke 1:39-80 (CEB)

76 You, child, will be called a prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare His way. 77 You will tell His people how to be saved through the forgiveness of their sins. 78 Because of our God's deep compassion, the dawn from heaven will break upon us, 79 to give light to those who are sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide us on the path of peace."

80 The child grew up, becoming strong in character. He was in the wilderness until he began his public ministry to Israel.

Then, in verse 76, Zechariah switches to singing about the Savior to prophesying about his own son. Bracket off verses 76-80 and write in the margin, "About John." Verse 76, But "You, child, will be called a prophet of the Most High, [John will be a prophet] for you will go before the Lord to prepare His way." Here he declares John's role as Elijah. But also note that Zechariah is saying that Jesus is indeed the Lord, He is actually God! Draw a line to "Lord" in verse 76 and write, "Jesus is God." What is the prophet John to do? Verse 77, "You will tell His people how to be saved through the forgiveness of their sins. [In Jesus, God is finally dealing with human sin and bringing true forgiveness. It's not earned, but instead is a gift. Verse 78,] Because of our God's deep compassion, the dawn from heaven will break upon us, 79 to give light to those who are sitting in darkness [there is the Gospel again: light to those in darkness] and in the shadow of death, [life to death], to guide us on the path of peace." We have peace! Light, life, peace. It comes to us–is given to us–in Jesus!

Then Luke wraps up the John birth narrative in verse 80: "The child grew up, becoming strong in character. He was in the wilderness until he began his public ministry to Israel." And it is in the wilderness that John and Jesus cross paths again.

PP#12: The Coming - Magnify and Bless

-Christmas is different with Luke 1

So, we've now read through the lengthy first chapter of Luke. Normally, for Christmas, we skip right to the main story, starting in Luke 2. You know how the story goes, "Now in those days Caesar Augustus decreed that everyone in the empire should be taxed." But we've taken care to go back and not just read the first chapter for Christmas, but to go through it carefully. We want to hear how this shows us that the what of Christmas (that Jesus was born) has an incredible "why" - what was actually going on. Luke felt this first chapter was crucial to understanding Christmas.

Do you now agree? I think this Christmas it has been good to start in chapter 1. As we've read through it, we've heard the gospel message 19 times...and Jesus isn't even born yet! By spending time in Luke 1, we realize that we don't just celebrate the *what* of Christmas, and the what

happened, you know, the donkey, the inn, the manger, the shepherds and angels. We now see it differently, with eyes looking at the stable, but with our ears ringing with the gospel message of our salvation: "Don't be afraid. God has heard you" (1:13), "Nothing is impossible for God" (1:37), "He has come to the aid of His people" (1:54), "He has raised up a mighty savior for us in His servant David's house" (1:69), "...to give light to those who are sitting in darkness...to guide us on the path of peace." (1:79).

PP#13: The Coming - Magnify and Bless

-Christmas is different with Luke 1

-Like Zechariah, we are changed (Bless)

This changes Christmas! Christmas is about Jesus, and how in Jesus God comes to give mercy, compassion, forgiveness, light, life, peace! We need to be like Zechariah, to let this Christmas transform us, to change our voice, to change our hearts, to change our world views.

The Holy Spirit is all over the place, active, doing things. He brings the change in Zechariah. He fills John the Baptist. He erupts at Christmas. And to take Jesus into our hearts at Christmas, we need to open our whole beings to the Holy Spirit of God. The one thing you can do to celebrate Christmas right is to open yourself to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

PP#14: The Coming - Magnify and Bless

-Christmas is different with Luke 1

-Like Zechariah, we are changed (Bless)

-Elizabeth's Christmas Sermon: Believe the Lord

We hear Elizabeth's Christmas sermon, "Blessed is the one who believes that the Lord would fulfill the promises He made to them." Christmas is about us believing this!

PP#15: The Coming - Magnify and Bless -Christmas is different with Luke 1 -Like Zechariah, we are changed (*Bless*) -Elizabeth's Christmas Sermon: Believe the Lord -Mary's response: *Magnify*

We break out with our response like Mary, "Magnify the Lord!" "Holy is His name!" Like Zechariah, "Bless the Lord!"

PP#16: The Coming - Magnify and Bless -Christmas is different with Luke 1 -Like Zechariah, we are changed (*Bless*) -Elizabeth's Christmas Sermon: Believe the Lord -Mary's response: *Magnify* -Joy erupts!

And when we do, joy erupts!

[Point to Flip chart with Joy listings: "Joy" in Luke 1 14 "Joy" 14 "Rejoice" 28 "Rejoice" 44 "Joy" 47 "Rejoice" 58 "Rejoiced" ("Celebrated")]

Oh how we need this, this Christmas! We desperately need the transformation into joy! And to get the full dose this Christmas, we need to back up and position ourselves directly under the outpouring of joy flowing out of Luke 1 and 2. "Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her king. Let every heart prepare Him room!"

Like Elizabeth and Mary and Zechariah, let's sing!

CLOSING SONG: Joy to the World -Sanctify

OFFERING: -Pastor David

-Give of your monies to God's work through this church. You can give in person, mail it in, drop it off or, most conveniently, you can make an electronic transfer or a debit card payment on the church website or by using the "square" on the bulletin.

ANNOUNCEMENTS -Pastor David

Wednesday night: Meal and Groups Next Sunday's message: Forth Sunday of Advent: The Christmas Story Read ahead the Christmas Story: Luke 2:1-20

MEMORY VERSE -Pastor David

"Blessed is the one who believed that the Lord would fulfill the promises He made to them." -Luke 1:45

BENEDICTION -Pastor David