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Luke 1:39-55

Mary was moving quickly to see her cousin Elizabeth. And this wasn't just a routine visit between cousins. In Luke's scene beforehand, the angel Gabriel visited Mary. When you envision the scene, make sure that you are picturing Mary correctly. She was a young teen, probably only twelve years old. Poor. Unmarried. This is the beginning of God's most powerful act, on behalf of the world. It centers in the life of a young, poor, single mom.

The angel Gabriel visited Mary, and told her that she had found favor with God. "[Y]ou will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus." (*Lk 1:31*) Gabriel then told her who Jesus would be: the fulfillment of promises made to David, reigning over Israel forever. You'll remember that Mary responded by asking, "How can this be?" (*Lk 1:34*) The angel explained. He also mentioned that her cousin Elizabeth was also carrying a miraculous child. Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord. Let it be with me according to your word." (*Lk 1:38*)

The next verse is 39 – "In those days, Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country..." Mary's response to this shocking experience with God's angel is to hit the road. She runs to visit her aged relative, Elizabeth: To

share the astounding news that she has received; To share God's promise of what is coming.

Luke very intentionally sets the political scene for his stories. We know from verse five that King Herod was in power in Judea (*Lk 1:5*). In chapter two, we hear about Emperor Augustus' census, and the governor, Quirinius. We know who the powerful are in this society – they are nothing like Mary. At Wednesday's Advent Bible study, we talked about why God chose Mary. It's not that she amazing on some scale. She didn't win "Israelite Idol" or "So You Think You Can Dance?" Her humble identity is what's important. God could have chosen someone powerful. Instead God chose to lift up the poor and to bless the downtrodden. It's just as the Old Testament prophets had been saying for years. In Mary, we see a fulfillment of God's promises – and in a beautiful way that forecasts God's justice to come.

In her own powerless way, Mary represents the faithful people of Israel. She was chosen to the carry a child who was also the Son of God. Just like the people of Israel were chosen, to bring light and salvation to the nations. Mary was chosen to bear and give birth to God's gift for the world. To witness the death of sin and the resurrection of the kingdom of life.

We are men and women. Most of us are Gentiles, not Jews. Our ages vary from older than Elizabeth's to younger than Mary's. Whatever our identity, God has drawn us into Christ's good news for the world. Like Mary, we have received blessings and fulfilled promises. In our experiences of baptism & at holy communion, we receive announcements of God's blessing upon us. *(1:42,45)* Every time that we read scripture, or hear it proclaimed, God speaks promises to us. From God we know:

- That there is more to life than TV would tell us – Tiger Woods' secrets aren't everything.
- Our quest for forgiveness from the sins that plague us – has already been offered with great love.
- Our longing for true connection (communion) are real – and are answered by Christ's Spirit and his church.
- Our uncertainty about the future – is quelled by trust in the guidance, courage and strength that we receive from God.
- A meaningful vocation in the world, which we desperately want – is given to us in the waters of baptism.

Like Mary, God has looked upon us with favor, even though we don't especially deserve it. Like Mary, we have been drawn into God's work in our world. We are part of the fulfillment of God's blessing for others. *(Lk 1:47-55)* It is obvious that none of us are carrying the Christ child. That was a special role that

only one woman can fill. We know that the story does not end with Mary's pregnancy. Christ was born. But each Sunday we proclaim the mystery of faith: Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

It is not just that this story has happened. Not only that we have received gifts from God. God's Spirit continues to move in each of our lives, Moves among us as families and as a congregation. Calls us to live as ministers in the world around us.

We are not Mary, but the Spirit of God is bearing Christ in us. Putting flesh on the goodness of God through our hands. Giving breath to God's love through our words. Participating in God's will for creation through our prayers. Sharing the wisdom of the Word through our learning and teaching together.

In the last month, I have witnessed the Spirit working through us: When members are truly excited about learning about God's word with people of all ages. I have felt it when our group attended the Christmas Memorial Service in Avalon, remembering God promises that joy will come again to those who mourn.

In the last week, I saw the Spirit's gifts in the face of a mother, whose children received some of our gifts from last week's Advent Day of Giving. I smelled it through the cookies that WELCA gathered to give to our shut-ins, as a reminder of God's love for them.

Male and female, God fills our empty places with forgiveness and love, mercy and grace. With much more than we can dream of! And these gifts are meant for more than just us. It is not: blessed are we, for we have been baptized. Instead: blessed are we, for we have received gifts to share with the poor and hungry, with people who are oppressed or abused – For people who feel unsatisfied, uncertain, or lost. God gives Jesus to the world for everyone, with eyes to see and ears to hear.

Brothers and sisters, like Mary, we are pregnant with God's grace. We bear God's presence and grace for the world. As a congregation, we have been doing that in especially clear ways in Advent. But how is God inviting Emanuel's to bless the world during the whole year? How can we run to share our blessings with others, as Mary rushed to Elizabeth's side?

We are all finishing those last preparations for Christmas. I have gifts to buy, cards to sign, and meals to plan. Jesus' birth is the end of Advent – but it's not the end of the Christian story. It is the beginning! It's an entrance into life in the kingdom of God.

As we prepare to celebrate Christmas, how will we celebrate the gift of Christ all year long?