

12/23/2018

“The Blessings of Believing”

Scripture: Luke 1:39-45(46-55); Micah 5:2-5a

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Theme: The truest blessings of Christmas come from believing that God sent his Son, born of the Holy Spirit, to save the world.

† **Elizabeth, and the baby John whom she was carrying within her, acknowledged that the unborn child of Mary was blessed by God.**

Today is the last Sunday in the Season of Advent, in which we reflect upon the coming of Jesus Christ into the world so long ago. Last Sunday, I encouraged listeners to “Believe the Impossible” as Mary, the mother of Jesus, had. This morning, I want to further consider us to realize the Blessings of Believing.

When we think about Christmas, what is it that we believe? And, in what ways are we blessed by the birth of Jesus, our Saviour?

On a lighter note, in speaking of Santa Claus, someone has said, “If you don’t believe, you don’t receive.” :)

But on pondering the mystery and marvel of the birth of Jesus Christ as told in the scripture and presented in song, one young man wrote, “I don’t know how a baby could come and save a sinner like me.”

As Luke tells it (Luke 1:39-45 NRSV) . . .

*³⁹ In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, ⁴⁰ where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth (her cousin). ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ⁴² and exclaimed with a loud cry, “**Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.** ⁴³ And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴ For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ And **blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.**”*

Notice that even Elizabeth’s unborn baby John, who would grow up to be known as John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Messiah, leaped for joy at his mother’s hearing the sound of Mary’s voice.

Elizabeth herself, who had previously been unable to have children, was filled with the Holy Spirit, as she proclaimed blessing upon Mary. And, she was somewhat overwhelmed with wonder at God’s use of her to be part of his wonderful plan of salvation.

And, Elizabeth further acknowledged God's blessing upon Mary for believing that God would use her to fulfil his marvelous plan as the angel told her.

† **Mary glorified God and considered herself blessed to be chosen by God to be the mother of Jesus.**

Luke writes (1:46-55) . . .

⁴⁶ And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸ for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; ⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. ⁵⁰ His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. ⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. ⁵² He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; ⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. ⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, ⁵⁵ according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

So, what are the true or real blessings of Christmas . . . that Mary received . . . that we can receive as well?

First there is joy. Mary proclaimed . . . *"My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me— holy is his name.* (Luke 1:46-50 NIV)

There is blessing in knowing that God's redemption is for all people – each and every person is valuable in God's eyes.

There is the blessing of God's mercy – the assurance of God's forgiveness

There is the blessing of salvation that comes by God's grace through faith or believing

There is the blessing of hope – that all will come to a saving knowledge of God in Christ

There is the blessing of peace – that all may know God's peace and shalom.

As Elizabeth's husband Zechariah, a priest of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, being filled with the Holy Spirit at the birth of his son John prophesied (Luke 1:68-79 NIV) . . .

⁶⁸ "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them. ⁶⁹ He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David ⁷⁰ (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), ⁷¹ salvation from our enemies and the hand of all who hate us— ⁷² to show mercy to our ancestors and to remember his holy covenant, ⁷³ the oath he swore to our father Abraham: ⁷⁴ to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear ⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. ⁷⁶ And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, ⁷⁷ to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, ⁷⁸ because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us

from heaven⁷⁹ to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.”

† **We, like Elizabeth and Zechariah, John, Mary and Joseph, can experience and receive the truest blessings of Christ’s coming into the world.**

So, what blessing or blessings are you hoping for this Christmas? And have you received and realized the greatest blessing of all?

Remember that the true blessings of Christmas come from believing God’s word – that God sent his Son, born of the Virgin Mary as a little baby, Jesus, to save the world.

May Patterson shared with readers of “The Upper Room” (12/21/18) in it’s blog this month. In her devotional, “The Recipe for a Merry Christmas,” the final ingredient was Unlimited Celebration. She said, “Sometimes, it’s easy to overlook Jesus, the reason for the season. This Christmas remember to celebrate the rich blessings of eternal hope, joy and peace Jesus came to give us: *“For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace”*. (Isaiah 9:6-7, NRSV)

My wish and prayer for each of you this Christmas is that you receive and realize the best of all blessings . . . the Blessings of Believing!

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Questions for Reflection:

In what ways do you consider yourself blessed by God?

What blessings are you hoping for this Christmas?

Have you received/realized the greatest blessing of all?