

## Great Fulfillment 12-20-15

Lord God, we love You for so many reasons – one of which is that You love us, regardless of where we are. You use the simple to fulfill Your will; You bless the poor. You are a Mighty God; we are Your children. Blessings! Honor! Wisdom! And Might are Yours now & forever & ever & ever... Amen.

The story of Mary! How beautiful! How touching! How humbling! Aren't you glad we remember her every Advent? After all, she had a pretty significant role in the divine plan - God coming to earth. When I was growing up, we had an aversion to her – she was catholic! If you were to get a Christmas card with the Holy Family on it, you knew it was from a catholic! See what prejudice w/o knowledge does? It still amazes me – we missed the total beauty of Mary, one w/a servant's heart, willing to be obedient regardless of the price she'd have to pay. It's an incredible story – one you don't want to miss!

Because it is such a joyful part of the Christ story, I hate to be negative, but I do have to say the Catholic Church has embellished the story – added ideas that are not in the Bible. First, the Immaculate Conception of Mary – a belief that someone who would bear God's Son could not have been normally conceived - & 2<sup>nd</sup>, the Assumption of the Virgin Mary – a belief that someone who had bourn the Son of God would not die a natural death- both are not biblical. They do not add to the story, they detract from it. After all, God does not use perfect people! God uses obedient people. Mary was obedient – embellishing the story distances us from God.

But the story all starts back in verse 5. A priest named Zechariah & his wife Elizabeth lived a blameless life – righteous b/4 God, obeying the commands and statutes of the Lord – they had been praying, but they had no children. While Z was serving in the temple, the angel Gabriel appeared to him & said their prayers have been answered. Elizabeth would bear a son. They would call him John. He would prepare people for the coming of the Lord.

Z. was baffled. He asked, “How should I know this? For I am an old man, & my wife is advanced in years.” Because of unbelief, Z. was unable to speak. He had to communicate in sign language. How did he tell the news to Elizabeth? He must have pointed to himself – & to Elizabeth - me, you – big belly, rocking baby. Sure enough, she conceived. She hid herself for 5 months.

In the 6<sup>th</sup> month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, the same angel Gabriel appeared to Mary & told her she’d conceive, bear a son – the Son of the Most High, & call His Name Jesus! Mary too had a question, but it was a question asked in faith “How will this be since I am a virgin.” (Z’s question was “How could this happen? My wife and I are too old!” Mary’s question “How will this happen?” is a totally different spirit! ) Gabriel explained – “the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. The child will be holy, the Son of God.” Gabriel also told Mary that her relative Elizabeth was pregnant & in her 6<sup>th</sup> month! Yes, this Elizabeth

who has been barren all of her life is going to have a baby! Nothing is too hard for God!

Then Mary responded to Gabriel about her forth-coming pregnancy - & it is astonishing! Listen to her answer, “Behold I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to Your word!” If that doesn’t give you pause, if that does not cause you to ponder, you’re dead inside. Thank you, Luke, for recording Mary’s amazing declaration! A poor young maiden, betrothed to a man named Joseph, willing to pay the price of possible ridicule – even death – goes full speed ahead following after God. “I am a servant of the Lord; be it done to me according to Your word!” Oh, God, may we too be so sensitive to Your Word that we will be willingly, without hesitation, to submit to Your will.

Now we pick up the story where our Gospel reading started. Mary went with haste to the hill country to a town in Judah – that was probably near Jerusalem since Z. was a priest in the temple there. Mary’s trip from Nazareth could have taken 3 to 5 days - it was 50 to 75 miles. We don’t know if she went alone – that could have been dangerous. Or, were there groups going there on a regular basis? We don’t know. What we do know is that she went in haste! She was in a hurry! We can guess why – she knew Elizabeth too was pregnant by divine decree! Mary knew Elizabeth would understand what had happened to her! She could hardly wait to tell her all about it! You know how it is when you have really good news to share! You want to tell it; but

you also want to tell it to someone who will understand – someone who will believe you –the 1<sup>st</sup> time!

Ironically, Mary never did have to explain. Upon hearing Mary's voice, the baby in Elizabeth's womb jumped! Elizabeth was filled w/the Holy Spirit & began to speak divine knowledge. "She exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord." Talk about affirmation! Elizabeth knew by revelation from God all that had taken place in Mary! No need to explain! Just time to rejoice! Can you imagine the two of them hugging! Dancing around! Full of wonder! Can you believe it? You in your old age; me in my youth – both expecting babies who are direct gifts from God!

Mary began to sing praises to the Most High God! Note the passion in this song. She says, "My soul magnifies the Lord, **47** and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, (she's not perfect; she needs a savior!) **48** for He has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; **49** for He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name. **50** And 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 mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; **53** He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty. **54** He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, **55** as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”

Notice the direction of Mary’s praise – she is praising God! It is all about God and the goodness of God! Yes, all generations call her blessed but it is because God has blessed her – to be blessed means to have been shown the favor of God. Mary makes it clear that it is all about what God has done for her – God’s favor. It is not because of any merit of her own.

In our bishop’s Christmas message in the NALC December Newsletter, he talks about the destructiveness of indifference – apathy or indifference kills. The opposite, passion, brings life. Bishop John bemoans the apathy of many who call themselves Christians. He goes on to say, “Every act of love, every expression of encouragement, every word that proclaims the Gospel of Jesus Christ makes a difference. Every disciple of Jesus possesses power in and through Christ, the capacity to make such a difference... Living and loving with the certainty that the only life worth living is a life of sacrifice and service for the sake of the ministry and mission of Christ.

We are not indifferent or apathetic about everything. We demonstrate our passion in concerts, in theaters, in football stadiums and basketball arenas, in celebrations with friends and co-workers. I believe the world is longing to experience passionate Christians who demonstrate a profound love for Jesus and for those to whom He has sent us with the Gospel. Love is always passionate towards the beloved. It is this passionate love that Christ has for us that is poured out on the cross for our redemption and salvation. What wondrous love is this! It is a love that compels us to love Christ and our neighbor as our self. We cannot simply strive to change our own attitude and disposition. We cannot overcome our apathy or indifference by simply willing it. This Wondrous Love, this One who gave His life for my redemption and salvation, who gives me life that is eternal is the One who transforms my indifference to passionate love toward Him and all those He came to save.

May the celebration of His birth, the wonder of His love, and the presence of Immanuel, God with us, overcome every manifestation of our indifference and transform it into manifestations of our passionate love for Christ and our neighbor.”

Let us pray that the same passion we see in Mary will grow in us. Oh, that the world would see our love for Jesus & our love for others & come to know the love of God in Christ Jesus. Amen.