

# NEW BEGINNINGS LUTHERAN CHURCH

Fourth Sunday in Advent – December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024 (11:11 am)

## PEACE IN THE MESS

*Psalm 80:1-7*  
*Micah 5:2-5a*  
*Hebrews 10:5-10*  
**Luke 1:39-45**

### The Lord Comes to Visit Us in Peace

The Fourth Sunday in Advent turns our attention toward the nativity of our Lord. With Mary, we await the coming of the Christ, her Son, conceived in her womb by the Spirit of God. As the Lord dealt graciously with her and did great things for her (Luke 1:48-49), so also He manifests Himself and His glory to us in mercy and gentleness. He comes to rule His people in peace, to “*shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD.*” He comes forth not from the great capital city of Rome or Jerusalem, but from lowly little Bethlehem (Micah 5:2, 4). He comes to sacrifice Himself, in fulfillment of His Father’s will, for the salvation and sanctification of His people (Heb. 10:10). He who once visited Elizabeth while hidden in the womb of Mary (Luke 1:39-45) now comes to visit us today, hidden in the lowliness of simple water, bread and wine.

Maybe some of you may have a sign on your wall that says, “**God bless this mess.**” God blessed Mary at a difficult time in her life, and yet she might as well have called it “**mess.**”

*We can all relate to the idea of mess, can't we?* And Christmas is, in many ways, the most complicated time of the year. There is a have a mess to try to organize or we all have a long to do list calling for our attention at this time of year. *Isn't it?* And conflicting schedules create a jumble of activities that we must prioritize.

Christmas is naturally the busiest and most stressful time of the year. We sometimes find it hard to believe that God can bless this chaotic and very busy time. But it was at a time like this that Jesus arrived among us. And we can learn from Mary that God blesses this mess in some very special ways indeed.

Elizabeth was the first in our text to get her priorities right. Now, Elizabeth always wanted a child, and she felt left out and alone because God didn't bless her with children. But now, in her old age, she has become pregnant. And as soon as she had this life-changing experience, her husband was suddenly deaf, and that the least opportune time! During a mess there are great challenges and God really helps – in ways we can't even imagine! Apparently, she was a little embarrassed about being pregnant at her age, because the Bible indicates that she had been in seclusion for five months when Mary arrived (*Luke 1:24*).

We can only imagine Elizabeth's thoughts of joy and anxiety. Finally, she would have a child to take care of. *But how could she properly care for this child in her old age? What would happen to this child if something happened to her?* Motherhood is an exhausting and endless task. *Could she do it at her age? How would she manage?* So, she had lots of reasons to be anxious and fearful.

If Elizabeth was in a mess, imagine what a mess Mary was. She too was unexpectedly pregnant. Joseph was confused, conflicted and upset with Mary. None of this had gone according to plan or even according to reasonable expectations. Mary was looking forward to getting married and having the chance to build a family with Joseph. But now, everything was happening at the same time.

Mary also had to deal with strange visits from angels and the staggering news about this baby's identity. It was an extremely stressful time in her life. Events and emotions were swirling around her. IT WAS MOST CERTAINLY A MESS!

Still, amidst the confusion in both women's lives, each responded with incredible faith. They opened up to the unexpected divine presence amidst all the confusion. The result was a poetic outpouring of praise to God. Mary's song of praise has become one of the most enduring and captivating poems of all time.

Our text takes up the story in which Mary left on a trip to visit Elizabeth in the mountainous region. Everything about this encounter is unusual. It was unusual for such a young woman to pay an unaccompanied visit to her family member, Elizabeth. The Bible indicates that they were related but does not state the exact degree of that relationship.

Mary speaks to Elizabeth first, but the Bible does not record what her greeting was. Elizabeth is immediately filled with the Holy Spirit and the child inside her jumped.

The first words out of Elizabeth's mouth are these: ***"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! <sup>43</sup> And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? <sup>44</sup> For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. <sup>45</sup> And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."***

In a culture where women rarely played public roles, it is unusual to find such deeply theological claims coming from a woman. God takes a simple and humble girl and deals with her graciously, transforming and exalting her. These women found deep faith amid life's confusion. *How did they do it?*

**One of the secrets of these two women's faithful lives is that, in the midst of life's confusion, they turned to God. They asked, "what does God want me to know?" or "What is God telling me in this mess?"**

Elizabeth heard God telling her that Mary would be the mother of the Lord. She knew this was no ordinary visit from a relative. This was the beginning of the long-awaited kingdom of God.

And Mary felt the profound impact of her pregnancy. She knew that God had looked upon her with favor. And she knew that child would mean that by means of her child, God would bring down the mighty from their thrones and raise up the lowly. God spoke to these women in the midst of the confusion. God is talking to us too, but we have a hard time hearing or understanding him amid our confusion.

Most of the time, we complain about the mess we're in, strategize how to get out of the mess, or at least try to find techniques to deal with the mess. But the deep question is, **"What is God telling us in this mess?"**

Maybe we can ask ourselves this question now about the specific problem in our lives. **What is God telling me in this mess?** Elizabeth and Mary heard the voice of God loud and clear in their confused lives. **So can we if we just listen.**

The next thing Mary did was dedicate her life to God. Mary said: **"Behold, the servant of the Lord: let it be done to me according to your word"**. She dedicated her life to God unconditionally.

One of the best ways to do this is to practice the spiritual disciplines of the Christian life. Anyone can do this. It simply means things like reading the Bible and praying. The rest is the result of faith and praying for God's help.

In the midst of all of life's confusion, God will speak to us in his word and bless our prayers, we can hear a word from God if we are reading His Word and praying every day that it might be helpful. Remember the question we asked earlier: **"What is God telling us in this mess?"** God will provide the answers we need faster than you can imagine.

Remember that Jesus was born in a stable. And a stable is a messy place. This new baby was out of place among the straw, spilled grain, and all the smells and sounds of the stable. **But Jesus Christ – our "Emmanuel" in the mess, is the heart of the Christmas message, is the ultimate Christmas gift – is our promised Saviour.** There is no stable, no place in our world that is too messy, too confusing that God cannot be found in His Holy Word and Sacraments that give us PEACE AND PURPOSE in the mess! Amen.