**Squamish United Church**

**December 15, 2024 Finding Joy in Our Purpose**

**Advent 3 Joy**

**Luke 1:39-45**

So today, we enter part 2 of our sermon series on Christmas through the eyes of Mary. In case you missed it, we heard two weeks ago that a virgin named Mary was visited by an angel named Gabriel. She was engaged to be married to Joseph and was told that she is going to have God’s child. It will be a boy and she will name him Jesus. “How can this be?” Mary asked, and that is all she asked, which is a miracle in itself, because I would have had a lot of questions: What’s going to happen? Will Joseph stick around? Will my parents still love me? Will my friends stand by me or will I get dragged into town and stoned to death? Will the pregnancy go all right? Will the labour be hard? Will there be someone to help me when my time comes? Will I know what to do? And the biggest question of all…Why me?

Christmas for Mary meant anxious questions with few answers. She was thoroughly shaken but the angel assured her that she had nothing to fear that God would be with her.

On Advent 1, we wrestled with the notion that while we are not biologically pregnant, we are all theologically pregnant. **WE are expecting the birth of a baby** and we better get ready because we have all been chosen by God.

**Elizabeth**

In today’s reading, we hear about Elizabeth who also been chosen by God to bear a son. So, here we have two parallel stories. Two women who are family, each chosen and favoured by God. Today we learn about the coming birth of John the Baptist and about his parents.  Their names were Zechariah and Elizabeth.  The word says they were righteous in God’s eyes, and careful to obey all the Lord’s commandments and regulations (Luke 1:6).  They were also both very old and unable to conceive.  Elizabeth was likely 88 and Zechariah 99!

One day while in the sanctuary of the Temple, Zechariah was visited by an angel of the Lord who told him that his wife Elizabeth would conceive a child.  Their son would be a man with the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17) and would prepare the people for the coming of the Lord.

**Mary**

This story lays side by side with Mary. When Elizabeth was in her sixth month of pregnancy, God sent the same angel Gabriel to Nazareth to visit Mary.  Mary had found favor with God and was chosen to conceive and give birth to a son who would be named Jesus (Luke 1:28-33).  The baby would be born holy and would be called the Son of God.  The angel also told her of her cousin Elizabeth’s pregnancy in her old age.  Mary was chosen to be the mother of our Savior whose Kin-dom will never end.

 “Mary responded, “I am the Lord’s servant.  May everything you have said about me come true.”  And then the angel left her.  
(Luke 1:38)

**Mary and Elizabeth**

Both of these women were graciously favored by God.  They were each predestined for incredible callings to be Mother’s to men that had been prophesied about.  The Messiah Jesus and John the Baptist who would have the power and spirit of Elijah.  When I stop to think about each of these miracles, I can imagine that each was excited to tell the other one the good news.  In fact, it was only a few days after the angel Gabriel came to her that Mary hurried to the town were Zechariah and Elizabeth lived.  At the sound of Mary’s greeting, Elizabeth’s child leaped within her, and she was filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:39-41). That baby leaped with joy!

What I couldn’t help but notice when I read the story this year, was Elizabeth’s reaction to Mary.  It struck me.  Here was a woman of old age who for 88 years believed that she would never conceive.  God had answered her and her husband’s prayers and blessed them with a son.  Yet when it came time to share this exciting news with Mary, this is what happened instead…

  “Elizabeth gave a glad cry and exclaimed to Mary, “God has blessed you above all women, and your child is blessed.  Why am I so honored, that the mother of my Lord should visit with me?  When I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy.  You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what he said.”  
Luke 1:42-45

Elizabeth chose humility, and gave her younger cousin the honor she was due. There was no jealousy at the fact that her little cousin was chosen to be the Mother of the Lord, there was no questioning why Mary had been chosen instead of herself, and there was no second-guessing God’s choice.  There was no regret that she was an old woman and likely wouldn’t see her son grow up. Instead, there was rejoicing that each one played a part in God’s perfect plan.

**No Comparison for Them**

These two Godly women could have glanced at each other and compared notes but instead they were able to give us a glimpse at what sisterly love is.  They each had a purpose set out before them and gave each other encouragement instead of questioning whose call was the better one. There were each at peace with themselves, with one another and with God.

Fast-forward to today and we still have woman called to do mighty things for God.  Each of us has a different set of talents and capabilities that enable us to fulfill our purposes. However, we are so prone to comparing ourselves to others.

Our standard becomes how we are compared to others women with the same calling as us.  If we don’t measure up in our own minds to what we think others expect of us, then we become failures.  Failures because we don’t have enough followers, subscribers, or likes on Facebook.  Failures because we aren’t as successful, or beautiful, or as popular.

The danger of this type of thinking is we get caught up in ourselves instead of God.  We sacrifice our own joy because we give the power over to others.

**How Can We Avoid the Comparison Trap?**

God’s word says that we are to pay special attention to our own calling and the work that is set out before us.  If we keep our eyes focused on God, we won’t need to glance to our right or our left. Be encouraged to know that Mary and Elizabeth both experienced miracles and each had their own path to follow.  Be encourage and know that to be expecting is one of the blessings of Advent. As we await Christ’s coming, we are all expecting, just like Mary. And our role in this narrative being told is in some ways just as important. Listen to these words from medieval mystic Meister Eckhart: “We are all meant to be mothers of God. What good is it to me if this eternal birth of the divine Son takes place each year but does not take place within myself? And what good is it to me that Mary is full of grace if I am not full of grace? What good is it to me for the Creator to give birth to his son if I do not also give birth to him in my time and culture?”

So, let us hail Mary this morning for what she has done. And then, let’s us take our place alongside her as God-bearers in this world, ones who have been called and favored by God. I know that can be scary. I know that can raise a lot of questions. You know, this Christian thing would be a lot easier if it came with step-by-step instruction. But it doesn’t. Instead, it comes with a promise and a call. God has a plan to use each one of us to make God’s love known here on earth. God comes to each of us this Christmas and says, “Jesus Christ is inside you. Will you give birth to God’s love in your life? Will you share Jesus with others? Will you share Jesus with the world?” The birth of Christ this year means that God again has favored us and wants to use us to make the kin-dom real here on earth. God wants to use us! That’s more than just a Christmas wish; it’s what we should be expecting. Thanks be to God. Amen