



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

December 16, 2021

Pastor Randy Ott

4th Sunday of Advent

First Lesson: [Genesis 4:1, 2, 6-8, 25-5:5](#)

Second Lesson: [Revelation 12:1-6](#)

Gospel Lesson/Sermon Text: [Luke 1:39-55](#)

The Lord is Coming: Behold!

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace, mercy and peace are yours from Him who is, who was, and who is to come.
Amen.

In Christ, dear fellow redeemed:

Anyone here today use the word “behold” yesterday, this last week? It’s not a word we really use a whole lot. Behold...if someone says “How are the grandkids?” If I grab my phone and I get a picture up, I don’t say “Behold!” That would sound kind of weird, wouldn’t it? You’d be a little worried about your pastor if that’s what he started doing. I think of the word “behold” more like the old King Kong movies. They captured the giant ape and they brought him back and put him on the stage in New York or some place. The guy introduces him and says “Behold Kong!” The curtains go back and everyone kind of oohs and aahs and jumps in fear. I think of “behold” as a word that means to stand in wonderment and awe at what you are looking at. That’s probably why I don’t use it that much.

But I think that was kind of what was in the heart of Mary and Elizabeth as they greeted each other though in [Luke 1](#). Wonder and awe; behold, God has kept His promises. Here was Elizabeth carrying the one who was promised by Isaiah who would prepare the way, the voice calling in the wilderness. And here was Mary with the one that would be the Savior; “How can I be so fortunate as to be with the one who is giving birth to the Lord,” as Elizabeth said. I think there is this sense of wonder and awe as they greet each other there in the Judean hillside.

So as we think about these two women and we see their awe, let’s focus on what they get excited about and think about what it is that they get excited about. Then maybe we can ask ourselves what it is that we get excited about at this time of the year.

The Gospel of Luke starts out with Luke, who was writing for Theophilus to tell him the story of Jesus. That's the purpose of his Gospel. Acts of the Apostles was also written by Luke for Theophilus to tell him what happened at Jesus' ascension and afterward, how the Gospel went forward. He starts out with the angel Gabriel coming to Zechariah when Zechariah was offering incense in the temple. He was one of the priests and the lot fell to him. So he goes in there and the angel Gabriel appears to him and tells him "Your wife is going to have a child and he is going to be the one promised to be the forerunner of the Christ. He'll turn many of His people back to God." He said some beautiful things in [Luke 1](#). Zechariah and Elizabeth, who are both very old, Zechariah says, "How can this happen since we are so old?" The angel says, "Here is how you know it's going to happen. For the next nine months, you aren't going to be able to talk." So his silence every day was a reminder of his lack of trust in the message that came to him from God.

Then we hear the angel coming to Mary and telling Mary that she is going to give birth to a Son. She says, "How can this be? I'm a virgin." "It's the fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah." Mary just says, "May it be unto me as the Lord has said." She believes the message of the angel and the angel even tells her that "Elizabeth, she who was said not to be able to have kids, is in her sixth month." We're assuming Mary is in Galilee, up north, so she goes to the hill country of Judea, which is a ways away. She had to travel all the way down south. She gets there to hill country to see Elizabeth and this is where our text picks up (what I just read to you). When she goes in, before she even says anything, we see Elizabeth reacts. The Spirit comes into her. The Spirit comes into John the Baptist so that he leaps for joy, as we are told. You see the wonder and awe in Elizabeth, but it's really directed towards God; that God was doing these things; that God was acting in the life of Mary. Elizabeth says, ***"But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"***

I wonder if she said that last line extra loud in the house so that Zechariah could hear it if he was around the corner some place as kind of a reminder that Mary, this humble servant girl, had the message from God and she believed it. But Elizabeth focuses on the promises that God had made to her. Mary was carrying the Lord. She was going to be the mother of the Lord. God Himself coming into our existence, coming into time as one of us so that He could live perfectly in our place and then die in our place. God kept His promises; all the promises in the Old Testament, all the promises that they had heard. The promises they had sung in the Psalms. Promises she probably didn't even recognize. But the one she did know she hung onto and she saw in the face of Mary the fulfillment of these promises because Mary believed what God had said and God was going to, as Mary says, do great things through her.

Then you see Mary responding with a song we call the Magnificat. When we use the service of Evening Prayer, this is what we sing as a song of praise after the sermon. It's

called the Magnificat because that's the first word in Latin. "My soul glorifies or praises God..." That's how it starts out in Latin, glorifies or praises, magnifies, or praises God. Isn't it interesting that's where she starts? Elizabeth had just said, "Why am I so blessed that the one who is going to give birth to my Savior is here in my house?" And Mary doesn't respond saying "You know, you're kind of right. You are lucky to be around me." We wouldn't say that, but we might think that pretty often. But Mary immediately goes right to "My soul glorifies the Lord because He has done great things for me. He has remembered His promises to Israel. He is God, my Savior." The great things that God had done for her and what He was going to do for the whole world was to be a Savior; not just to come to give us something to celebrate and exchange gifts over but to come and pay for the sins of the whole world so that we can lay our head on our pillow every night and know our God loves us so much that He left heaven and came to be one of us. I'll never wrap my head around that truth.

I don't understand a God who loves us so much that He leaves perfection to enter this world and its imperfection and its pain and its hurts, its disappointments and its sorrows. He took them ALL on himself and He did it so you and I would have that time, and He would be (just like for Mary) our Savior so that we know that we are loved and forgiven by our God. We know we disappoint Him often. We know we fail Him. Yet His love for us is certain because it was accomplished through a humble servant girl who simply says "May it be to me as the Lord has said" and then gives all the glory and the praise to God. Not to herself, but to God because He does great things.

At the end she says, ***"He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors."*** She knew this wasn't just a one-time thing just for her. This was for all people of all time, this promise of a Savior to come, and she was chosen out of God's grace to be the one who would give birth.

Incredible things were being done in Elizabeth and Mary, and through Elizabeth and Mary. Yet their focus was on God. Behold! God is entering time so that you and I might enter eternity.

The thing I wonder about though is how much time do we really spend at this time of the year thinking about God? How much time do we spend at this time of the year just thinking about how amazing it is that He left heaven and came to earth just so He could die for a sinful wretch like me and like you? Do we kind of just take that for granted because we're so busy in all of the things that are enjoyable and fun for us at this time of the year? Our family Christmas traditions, trying to find the right gift for the right person; so often it seems like we're so busy at this time of the year chasing our tail that we forget, or it's easy to forget (is that fair?), what we are celebrating.

Think about all that He had to go through so that we could be forgiven and we see we end up doing the exact opposite sometimes of Mary and Elizabeth. We turn around and make Christmas more about ourselves. As a kid, for me Christmas meant "What am I going to get?" That's where my thoughts stopped. "Oh yeah, I have to get mom and dad something too. I have to remember to do that. But what am I going to get?" Sometimes as we get older it's the joy I get out of my children in a program or the family tradition of going to a certain service at a certain time because it brings back warm, fuzzy memories of a childhood gone by. Those are great things, don't get me wrong. But doesn't that kind of fall short of "Behold! God is entering into human existence to die for me"?

Oh, I've disappointed my God at this time of the year so often. I just turned 58. Probably from ages 1-58 I think I've disappointed Him. Maybe I didn't do it my first year or I didn't do it so much. I don't know. But I think it's easy at this time of the year to forget it's really about Jesus and this incredible love and to stand in awe of who He is and what He did for us. The most incredible thing about our God is that when He reminds us that it's really all about Him, maybe it's through a song we hear on the radio, maybe it's through something at worship, maybe it's something we read at home, maybe it's a friend or a neighbor that reminds us and it kind of pricks our conscience that sometimes we let it slip into something else. But we can be absolutely certain that our God still loves us and forgives us for all the times we have put something else in front of Him. There is absolutely no doubt that He forgives us because Jesus entered into time to live and die for our sins so that we are certain that eternity is ours.

That amazing truth is not covered up by our failures. That's why Jesus came, because we have a lot of Cain in us at times. We have a lot of capability for sin. But our Savior's love is greater than our sin. Our Savior's love has opened heaven to us. And our Savior's love grabs us gently by the hand, puts the other arm around our shoulder and says, "I still love you. I sent my Son to die for you. I covered all your sins." And with that truth replanted and watered in our hearts through the Gospel, we can celebrate and say "Behold!" Not with a sense of irony but with a sense of awe. Look at how God treats me again today, just like He did yesterday and just like He will tomorrow. He loves and forgives me. That's something we get to unwrap every day. Amen.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ([Philippians 4:7](#).) Amen.