

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Sermon text: Luke 1:39-56

Related text: Micah 5:2-5a

Date preached: December 23, 2012

Grace to you and peace from God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN.

Elizabeth and Mary; they are two women whose pregnancies were remarkable yet for two totally different reasons.

Elizabeth is a woman described as righteous, blameless, growing old and most significantly, without a child. Her womb is barren. There are no scientific or medical resources to aid in helping her conceive a child from her husband Zechariah.

In biblical days there was a stigma attached to women who did not bear a child, especially a male. To be childless was also a slight to Zechariah. There would be no offspring to carry forth the family history, tradition, and most importantly, the name. This also left Elizabeth without anyone to care for her should Zechariah precede her in death.

Her barren womb is dead. There is no life. Elizabeth's story is similar to another woman whose womb was

barren. Her name was Sarah. Through her, she and Abraham became the parents of many nations.

For both Sarah and Elizabeth, it was God who made the dead come alive. Isaac and John were born. Each one was called to serve the Living God, who triumphs over death.

There are many people who are like Elizabeth and Sarah. They are women of faith, who for a variety of reasons are unable to conceive. Behind the smile is the longing to experience what it is like to hold a child in their arms. It is a silent suffering that frequently goes unnoticed.

Then there is Mary. She is a young woman who is certainly not expecting to become pregnant. She is not married. To be pregnant outside of marriage leaves her susceptible to being stoned to death. You hear that haunting truth from the Gospel according to Matthew. It was Joseph who was willing to dismiss her quietly.

Intervening in the life of both Mary and Joseph is the Holy Spirit. The Lord, the giver of Life caused Mary to conceive. Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit pronounces this blessing upon Mary. "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!"

The Lord, the giver of life imparted the truth to Joseph that the child she bears will save his people from their sins.

The Christ child's birth we celebrate means life in the face of a lifeless world. In a world where we belittle people for opinions we do not share, enters life. In a world where murder is declared a choice, where children never see the light of day, or are not permitted to live into adulthood, Christ enters dispelling the darkness of our sin.

Christ enters the darkness of those not blessed to be parents, casting out the sins of jealousy and envy. As proclaimed in the very first chapter according to the Gospel of John, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."

This is the blessing of life, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. This child she shall hold in her hands will be the one to have his hands penetrated with nails. Silent in birth is the one who will be silent at the time of his trial.

From the cross, the one who had entered the world pleads for the life of the world with the words, "Father,

forgive them for they know not what they do.” He who pleads for us, is the one who gathers us, that we may dwell secure in his presence. Such security is not by our doing, but through Christ the Lord.

As God looked upon Mary’s humble estate, so too, has he looked upon us. As Mary was blessed through her son, we too are blessed through him. Christ was born to save.

Our response to the good news is to praise God. Just as Mary sang unto the Lord, so we too sing. We sing and speak of the peace that we have with Christ. We proclaim the life that Christ has won for us.

That is our Mission. That is the blessing of life.