



4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent – December 21-22, 2024

Preacher: Pastor Scott Oelhafen

Sermon Theme: Be Spiritually Ready for Christmas

Sermon Text: Luke 1: 46-55

***<sup>46</sup> And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord <sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, <sup>48</sup> for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, <sup>49</sup> for the Mighty One has done great things for me— holy is his name. <sup>50</sup> His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. <sup>51</sup> He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. <sup>52</sup> He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. <sup>53</sup> He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. <sup>54</sup> He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful <sup>55</sup> to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors."***

Dear friends of the Coming Christ-child,

Are you ready for Christmas? That's sort of a loaded question, isn't it? So much to do and so little time to do it. This time of year, it's easy to get worked up and stressed out about decorations, wrapping the presents and preparing the holiday food. And I think I finally figured out why I'm worked up and stressed out. I'm tired and here's why. There are @300 million people in our country. @59 million people are retired and 34 million more are in college or tech schools. That leaves a little over 200 million people to do the work. Then of course, we have to subtract another 55 million kids in grade school and high school and of course there are 30 million kids under the age of five. So now we're almost under 100 million people to do all the work. Take away 30 million people employed by the government, millions more who are institutionalized, on vacations or even busy watching TV or streaming video, that pretty much leaves you and me to do all the work. And I'm the one up here doing all the talking. No wonder I'm tired this December. This just goes to show you: it really doesn't take much to convince ourselves we have it so hard these days before Christmas that we totally miss the point why we celebrate the Christmas Season. It's easy to put ourselves on a pedestal, to point out all the work we've done or the important work we have to do that we become totally frustrated and unprepared for Christmas. Tonight/today, God's Word shift our attention from ourselves to someone else who from all outward signs didn't seem prepared for Christmas. Turns out, she was totally ready – spiritually ready. Tonight/today, let's consider the Godly example of Mary, the mother of Jesus, and then realize how God's Word in Luke chapter 1 challenges each of us to **Be Spiritually Ready for Christmas**. Be ready with a humble heart. And be ready with a peaceful heart.

Here in the Lutheran church, I don't believe we give Mary enough attention or even enough credit. Of course we don't pray to her or worship her, for the obvious reasons she gives us: she's a sinner who needed a Savior as much as we do. She said so in

the words of Luke, chapter one. But, there's a real temptation to forget about Mary and ignore her. But, Holy Scripture doesn't forget about her or ignore her and so we won't either. Instead, we'd do well to praise God for her, and we'd do better to use her as our model of Christian faith especially during this busy time of the year for us to take God at his Word and to step up and serve him faithfully.

If there was ever anyone who had the right to feel overworked, overwhelmed, and unprepared for Christmas, it had to be Mary. Overworked because here she is as a young 14 or 15 year old girl, almost nine months pregnant and legally required by her government to walk the 70 miles from Nazareth to the little town of Bethlehem to be counted in a Roman census. She was overwhelmed because she, a simple peasant Jewish girl, pledged to be married to Joseph, was still a virgin but she was pregnant, carrying the Messiah, the Christ-child, God-himself. And she was unprepared – because here she was, about to give birth, yet they were still running around the streets of Bethlehem trying to find a decent place to stay overnight, there was no room for them in the inn. From all earthly indications, Mary wasn't one bit ready for Christmas. But, inwardly, most importantly, she was Spiritually-ready for Christmas

How do we know this is? Consider the words from Luke, chapter one. This section of God's Word is known today as the *Magnificat*, the song of Mary we sang for the past three Midweek Advent services here at St. Paul's. We can only imagine how excited and nervous Mary must've been after the visit from the angel Gabriel who appeared to her and told her she'd give birth to the Christ-child. When we receive exciting news, what do we do with it? Obviously, we tell others. And that's exactly what Mary did. These were the words Mary used when she visited her cousin Elizabeth.

As Mary spoke, it would've been easy for her to put herself on a pedestal. I mean here she was the mother of the Son of God – who else can say that, honestly? Yet, as we read the words of our sermon text, we don't find even a hint of pride or arrogance but rather a humble spirit. She didn't talk about all the things she did for God. Rather she fixates on all the things God did for her and for us. Our reading begins this: <sup>46</sup>***And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord*** <sup>47</sup>***and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,*** <sup>48</sup>***for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed,*** <sup>49</sup>***for the Mighty One has done great things for me— holy is his name ... He has brought down rulers from their thrones and lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.*** As Mary looked at herself, she couldn't understand why God picked her to be part of salvation's story. She calls God, her Savior – needing to be forgiven of her sins just like we have to be forgiven. That kind of humility is precious in God's sight. A virgin becomes pregnant, God becomes man, and Mary gets the front row seat to all the action. Then again, later on Mary also had a front row seat when she saw Jesus grow up to make up for the sins of the world, make up for our sins in full. Jesus made right everything that we had done wrong. And she had a front row seat then she saw Jesus crucified on the cross, abandoned by the Father and everyone else to pay the debt we owed God. She saw him die and finally had a front row seat to see him alive

again. And her witness speaks to us today through God's Word to give credit where credit is due.

The next time you feel unprepared for Christmas, and we all will with everything we have to do in the next few days, think how Mary prepared for that first Christmas. To Mary, it meant one thing: the coming of Jesus Christ, the coming of her Savior. That's why she was prepared.

It's easy to forget the meaning of Christmas, isn't it? I think of two ladies who were standing in front of a busy department store window that displayed a manger scene. Disgusted, the one said to the other. "Look at that, even the church is trying to horn in on Christmas." Sadly, to many people Christmas has become a holiday that has little to do with Jesus and that's why many find themselves hurried and unprepared. We can even feel that way at times and forget about the Savior and the peace He has come to bring.

Last weekend, Pastor Smith talked about the peace Jesus came to bring, not a fake or short-term peace on earth, but a real peace: peace between a holy God and sinful people, the peace of knowing that he is no longer angry with us; through faith, he accepts us and loves us as His own.

Mary talked about that peace when she said: <sup>54</sup>***God has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful <sup>55</sup> to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors.*** When Mary remembered that God always keeps his promises, she had peace. No matter how chaotic life got, no matter how her finances, her health, or how her life was going, she had peace of knowing God would always take care of her. This peace wasn't just for Mary. It's for us today. It's a peace we need right here, right now, especially when life doesn't go the way we think it should. Advent prepares us for Christmas. And the message Mary has for us today, is that God's peace rests with us, all because of the coming Christ-child.

When we get to heaven, I have many different questions for Mary how she raised Jesus. Don't you? I have questions like: Mary -- did you ever feel awkward teaching Jesus how he created the world? Did he ever have a distant look on his face like he was listening to someone else you couldn't hear or see? Did the thought ever occur to you that the God to whom you were praying was asleep under your own roof? When he saw a lamb being led to the slaughter, did he act any different? I suppose all these questions will be perfectly answered when we get to heaven. Instead, we still have Christian work to do right now, as we love God and love others, as we invite others to come to St. Paul's for Christmas services. So let's not feel sorry for ourselves with all the work we have to do. Instead, like Mary, let's be Spiritually Ready for Christmas with a humble and peaceful heart. God bless your final advent preparations as we await Christ's coming. Amen.