

## *Are You Ready For An Upside Down World?*

Luke 1:46b-55; Luke 1:26-38

A-3B

December 21, 2008

**Luke 1:46-55** <sup>46</sup> And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, <sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, <sup>48</sup> for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; <sup>49</sup> for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. <sup>50</sup> His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. <sup>51</sup> He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. <sup>52</sup> He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; <sup>53</sup> he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. <sup>54</sup> He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, <sup>55</sup> according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

**Luke 1:26-38** <sup>26</sup> In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup> And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." <sup>29</sup> But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup> The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. <sup>33</sup> He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." <sup>34</sup> Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" <sup>35</sup> The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. <sup>36</sup> And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. <sup>37</sup> For nothing will be impossible with God." <sup>38</sup> Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

This is the **Fourth** and last **Sunday of Advent**. There is the last candle to be lit in our Advent Wreath – candle four, the **candle of love**. We have lit candles signifying *hope, peace, joy and now love*. This is the Sunday of anticipation of the love that God is birthing into

this world. This love takes concrete human form, in the form of an infant child born to Mary and to Joseph. On **Christmas Eve** the center **white candle** will be lit to celebrate this wondrous birth of Jesus. The circumstances of Mary's pregnancy, the birth of the child Jesus, and the immediate days that follow – days of fright and flight are part of a drama that captures our imagination forever. We never tire of this story. We only grow more amazed at the details and the majesty of this mysterious gift from God.

On this Fourth Sunday the wondrous gift of the love of God is in a heightened stage of anticipation. This anticipation makes our senses more alive and on edge. This day of birthing will **change** everything and **turn our world upside down!** Are you ready for your world to be turned upside down? I think that most of us would rather not have our world change. We would rather admire Jesus than to allow him to lead us into a new upside down world of the Kingdom of Heaven. It is only when we have our back up against the world and everything that we hold dear and comfortable will begin to see an opening for change.

The **annunciation** to Mary by the angel Gabriel sets this eternal drama in motion. The angel Gabriel announces to a very

young and innocent girl that she is highly favored and blessed. This favor means that she is carrying in her womb a special child, a divine child who will be named Jesus, his name meaning "**Jehovah is salvation**". The holy conception, the scandalous pregnancy, and the humble scene of delivery are all filled with uncertainty. No one can explain it. It is even a scandal to the friends and neighbors because this young woman is pregnant before the right time. Even Mary searches to understand her condition or what is expected of her.

As child grows within Mary's womb, bearing life and hope, Mary goes to see her **cousin, Elizabeth**, who had been unable to have a child until recently; and Elizabeth is also carrying a child. But, she is taken aback when a strange experience happens at Elizabeth's home upon her arrival. When Mary approaches Elizabeth, the spirit leaps from Mary's womb to that of her cousin and the life of John the Baptist stirs within her. Then Elizabeth **exclaims joyfully, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!"** This is later to become part of the famous "**Hail, Mary. Hail Mary, full of grace. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb—Jesus.**"

In response, Mary bursts out into a declaration of praise and joy about her anticipated son and his unique role. “***My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior...***” Mary’s proclamation is both shocking and scary at the same time. She declares that Jesus is going to turn the world upside down. His birth will mean that the **high and mighty**, the most powerful, will lose their power and influence. The powerful will fall. But, she also says that the **birth of Jesus** will reverse the fortunes of the lowly and weak to bring them the riches of heaven and the power of the divine to live in peace and harmony. “*He has **exalted** those of low degree...*” The **rich** will go away hungry and empty, while the **poor** will be **filled with** and **find joy and hope**.

This is the dream of God that brings divine **justice and mercy** to everyone. This is the true love of heaven, which brings a restoration our humanity that God intended all along. This divine justice and mercy is the peace and shalom of the Old Testament prophets. And, it fulfills what the prophet **Micah** says the “What does the Lord require...***Lord requires of us – to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.***” (Micah 6:8) This holy love that comes down at Christmas in Bethlehem will be directed

toward those persons in our midst who are the least, lame, and left out. It will be justice and mercy and kindness brought near to the lowest and the least among us. Surely if it is this love for them, it will be for all of us. No one will be left out. The world's leaders and religious will be challenged to change their attitudes and loving care for all God's children. No one shall be excluded.

God will make things right. All over the world there are abuses of those who are weak and powerless. God is making straight the way for this servant to fulfill the deepest hope for relationship with God. And the Lord God sees that there are too many who are mistreated and abused, for too long. Now is the time for God to act love to bring justice to all. For goodness sake we will be more angry at a person who is hungry and grabs a loaf of bread than a CEO who leaves town with corporation money and bilking pensions of those who have worked hard and have been faithful workers.

**What** is this justice of God? When we vigorously prosecute suspected fraud in Medicare and Medicaid more than the insurance companies who deny coverage for a mother of children dying of cancer, is this justice. When we turn our minds away from the brutality of child soldiers conscripted in countries, is this the justice of

God. When we make peace with tyrants to get a little oil, is this fair? When we turn our heads from the auto industry who has failed to make vehicles that can save gas, keep clean the air we breathe, is this just and right for everyone? When we cut jobs and fill the pockets of CEO's, because they have the power and influence of money and politics is this right and just in God's eyes? When we blame problems of health and education on immigrants who come to this country to make a reasonable and decent living – desperately trying to send money back home for their families to survive, is this just? When payday and title lenders take advantage of the poor with high interest rates and burdensome fees, is this right?

Creating justice that suits our needs and feeds our fears is against God's rule of mercy for the poor. Worldly justice that favors one segment of God's creation over another is not true Justice. Divine Justice is **not blind** to these corrupt systems of the kingdoms of earth. When corporations and governments are mute, uncaring, lacking compassion, merciless and mercenary to the children of this earth, then this cannot be the way of God's child of Bethlehem. This is counter to the birth of God's son. So, when God sends a child to turn the world upside down and inside out, we must ask ourselves,

**Are we ready** to receive this agent of divine love, mercy, and justice?” We cannot have sympathy for King Herods of this world who would go to any length to be rid of such a threat to our values and traditions. Herod was so worried and anxious about a king taking his place that he killed thousands of children, in hope of eliminating the threat of the Christ child. Kill the messenger and kill the message! Desperate people do stupid and desperate things to keep their world in tact, even if it is evil and corrupt. On the other hand, God’s dream of a kingdom of heaven on earth defines new relationships of fairness and justice.

**Are we ready for this child to invade our life on Christmas day?** Of course not, we would only be deluding ourselves, if we so calmly and confidently said, “**yes.**” Because Mary gives us this baby, he will do what God intends for him to do – he will change our thoughts and our values and put them in line with the Kingdom of Heaven. He will make us look at each other, all of us as brothers and sisters, not as people of the first world or second world, or third world, or as black or white or yellow or brown. He will not let us look at each other as rich or poor, immigrant or US citizen. He will see all of us as children of his heavenly father to whom we have a sacred and

binding relationship. With this child of Bethlehem, we can no longer be male or female, Jew or Gentile, American or Asian. We must all be **one in Christ**. This infant child of God will answer the haunting question of Cain and Abel. “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Mary’s son, Jesus, makes all of us our brother and sister’s keeper.

Did Mary really know what was going to be happening with her baby? She knew God had big dreams and she magnifies the glory of the Lord in his coming. The words of the popular song ***Mary Did You Know*** seems to be speaking of a Christ child beyond our imagination, who will **scatter the proud** in their thoughts. The early Christians learned that Christ would bring hope through love made real in justice and mercy. So when they started speaking the name of Christ, they were accused of **turning the world upside down**. Will this Christmas gift from God change our lives today? What can happen to us today when Jesus Christ reigns in our world? Could it be that you and I become remade in his image, not in our image, but God’s divine image?

Mary, did you know

That your baby boy would some day walk on water?

Mary, did you know

That your baby boy will save our sons and daughters?

Did you know

That your baby boy has come to make you new?

This child that you've delivered

Will soon deliver you

Mary, did you know

That your baby boy will give sight to a blind man?

Mary, did you know

That your baby boy will calm a storm with His hand?

Did you know

That your baby boy has walked where angels trod?

When you've kissed your little baby

Then you've kissed the face of God

Mary, did you know?

Mary, did you know?

The blind will see

The deaf will hear

The dead will live again

The lame will leap  
The dumb will speak  
The praises of the Lamb

Mary, did you know  
That your baby boy is Lord of all creation?  
Mary, did you know  
That your baby boy will one day rule the nations?  
Did you know  
That your baby boy is heaven's perfect Lamb?  
This sleeping child you're holding  
Is the Great I Am

“I am the light of life; I am the bread of life; I am the living water” This is the gift of the Great I AM. We have a child who takes away our fears This Christ child will show us what Micah means – “to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God.” But this child of Mary must turn our world on end, upside down to be anything like that of the kingdom of heaven. Merry Christmas to you all.