

God Conceives Within Each of Us
December 20, 2009
Luke 1:39-45

Our scripture reading this morning comes from the 1st Chapter of Luke, verses 39 through 45. Please listen for the reading of God's Word for His people.

³⁹At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, ⁴⁰where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴²In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! ⁴³But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!"

This is the Word of God and It can be trusted.
Thanks be to God.

Let us pray:

Oh Lord, speak in this place today, in the calming of our minds and the longing of our hearts, by the words of my lips and in the meditations of our hearts. Prepare us, oh Lord, your servants – just as you prepared Mary for the coming of the Christ Child, prepare us today for the receiving of Your Word. Open our eyes that we may see, our hearts that we may feel, our ears that we may hear and our minds that we may come to understand all that you have to offer us today. In Christ wonderful and holy name we pray. Amen!

During the Advent Season we have had an opportunity to speak of anticipation, preparation and action. That is, we have spoken to an awareness of sin in our lives and the need for the long awaited Messiah; one that offers the *good news* of personal relationship and reconciliation with our Creator. For a couple of weeks now, we have read about John's responsibility to prepare the Jewish Nation for the message that would be brought by Jesus of Nazareth, a message that would bring comfort and hope to a lost and dying world. "I baptize you with water," John says, "But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. (Luke 3:16).

The exhortations that John brought the people of the wilderness led them to an awareness of their sin, an awareness of their failure to walk in God's will and way for them. John prepared the people for a message of hope, peace, joy and love – all of the themes which advent brings to us each year – a message that would prepare them for relationship and reconciliation; a message that brings us today into relationship with our God through the message of the now resurrected Christ.

Today, however, we take a step back in time; a look at the beginning. We take a look at a relationship that formed within the womb of two women; Mary and Elizabeth. By examining the relationship of not only these two women, but also the miracle of their conceptions, we not only find hope in God's plan of Salvation and the grace offered by the redemptive love of our Creator, but we also find a modern word for our lives; one that reminds us of God's plan and call on our own lives. "Just as Jesus Christ was born of Mary 2,000 years ago, so by His Spirit does Christ continue to be born with each of us. Receiving this new life can and will be as wonderful and painful for you as it was for Mary." (Barnes, 2000)

In examining the lives of these two women, Mary and Elizabeth, we see an amazing contrast in not only their lives, but in their pregnancies and their calls. These two ladies were quite the pair. Elizabeth was not a young woman. After many years of praying for a child, after becoming used to being without a child of her own and after getting to the age where giving birth to a child was not a good idea, Elizabeth gets pregnant. Her child was to be called John and he would prepare the way for Christ. Then there is Mary; a very young woman. Mary also hoped for a child someday, when it would be appropriate; but not now. She wasn't married and she was still a virgin. So we have Mary and Elizabeth, two women who are pregnant; one of them is too old to be a mother and the other is too young, yet both are in the hands of God.

As we have discussed before, the Bible constantly illustrates that God's timing is generally not ours and often takes us by surprise. Sometimes, as with Elizabeth we feel that God moves too slowly. Other times, as with Mary, we feel that God moves too quickly. How many of you here today have found yourselves, like Elizabeth, praying for a long time for something to happen? Maybe you've been praying for a healing, for a help mate, or for financial independence and security. Maybe you've been praying for so long that you are beginning to think that now that it may never happen. Obviously you can't make it happen, because if you could have, you would have already done so. Clearly, you are not in control. How many of the others of you here today, like Mary, find that your lives have become all disheveled this year? God has conceived something in your life that you didn't ask for. Maybe what God has offered you doesn't make sense. Maybe you are frightened, confused and slowly, but surely, you have begun to realize that you are not in control either.

As we each come together to worship each Sunday, each of us from our differing backgrounds, experiences and faith traditions, rest assured that there is at least one thing that we

each have in common – none of us are in control of our own lives. And so, in recognizing that each of us are without control over our own lives, we flock together each week, much in the same way that those who heard the message of John flocked to the wilderness to hear of the coming their long awaited Messiah. Many are comfortable in accepting that we gather together each week because we are like minded in our understanding and acceptance of God’s love and grace for each of us. But notice here that, according to Luke’s gospel, after Mary discovered that she would give birth to the Messiah the first person she went to was not Joseph or her parents but her cousin Elizabeth whose life was also clearly out of control. Likewise, we gather each week not only because of our like mindedness and understanding based on a series of beliefs, but also because of our need to be with others who recognize that they are not in control of their lives; that without God, we are on the wrong path – moving in the wrong direction outside of God’s Will and God’s Way for our lives.

Just as biological pregnancy produces physical life, so the act of repentance produces spiritual life within each of us. Just as cells begin to divide to create organs, flesh and bones within the womb, so does the Holy Spirit of God completely overtake us and begin to create life within each of us. When a woman’s body begins to prepare itself for the birthing process she finds that she is no longer in control of her body. Equally so, through repentance and submission to the Will of God in our lives, we find that we are no longer in control; rather it is the new life that begins to control us.

The new life God creates in you may give you a calling that scares you. It may give you gifts, passions and dreams you never expected to have. It may take loved ones away from you that you would rather keep or it may bring new loved ones into your life that you would rather not have. Don’t be surprised if you don’t understand it. You’re not the Creator. The Reverend

Linda Veltheim has a saying and that is “God is God and you’re not.” I find comfort in the fact that I don’t have to be worried about tomorrow, or the direction in which my life is leading and honestly, so should you. We are not called to be the Creator of our own destinies, rather we are call to receive what God has planned for us and to wait patiently as it unfolds and develops within our lives.

Maybe you are waiting today on a relationship that is slowly changing, a new job offer or for word about a healing that just doesn’t seem to come. The longer you wait the harder it becomes. And you know what . . . it’s ok. Each day God continues to move us closer and closer to a new life. Like a pregnant woman who has come to term, it gets harder and harder for us to bear that new life in a body that has been stretched further than we might have thought possible. Eventually we get to the point where we find ourselves crying out, “God, stop teaching me about patience. I can’t handle any more lessons on that.” Or we pray, “God, stop teaching me how to love difficult people. It is easier just being mean and caddy.” Or we say, “God, stop teaching me to depend only on you. I’ve given you all there is to give.” And for some us we cry out, “God, please stop breaking my heart with the needs of other people. I can’t keep caring so much.” When we say things like this, it is only because the new creation within us has almost matured to full term. We are almost there.

I can’t help but think for a moment about all those women who for whatever reason will not experience the physical act of birthing. For them, and certainly for many within our community, the analogy of physical birth escapes our understanding. But know this, regardless of our own understanding of physical birth; God has conceived within each of us a new life. On the level of the physical understanding of life, I believe that my relationship with God has given me the opportunity to experience what my physical nature could not provide me. Looking at life

through human eyes and understanding, I found myself regretting that I would never have a child of my own to love. But God's timing is not our timing.

God blessed me in many ways when Chris was placed into my life. One such blessing includes giving me a son that I would not have otherwise had. Our son Blake has given me experiences, emotions and feelings of pride that I could have never experienced without him in my life. There is little that equals seeing a child grow into a young man (or woman), enter into high school, show interest in football, girls and in God, to learn to drive and to give you that hug and say that he loves you. Without God in our lives, there is so much to be missed. Sure, we can live a relatively decent life on our own, but once we've experienced a new life in Christ; a life experienced to the fullest, we are hard pressed to desire anything less.

Don't let the world keep you down and don't allow yourself to keep you down. Don't let the questions of life distract you from the Will of God in your life. Mary had plans to wed Joseph, to eventually start a family, to begin a new life with a new husband and God came along with a different plan. It may not have been her plan but it was still a good plan. In fact it was great plan because it was God's plan. What is God's plan for you today? Does it align with what you have laid out for yourself, or does God's plan require a radical make over in your life? These questions are worth pondering. In pondering these questions we must give ourselves permission to receive the new life that has been conceived within each of us and allow it to develop to full term. Somehow at Christmas, it is easier to pay attention to the holiness of God within us, but we must carry this awareness of beyond this holiday season and into the New Year, into all aspects of our daily lives. Won't you receive God's Salvation today?

O God Emmanuel, your Christmas gifts of peace, hope, joy and love have been waiting in our souls; waiting for you to make them leap up and take over our lives. Amen.