**December 20, 2020 Luke 1:26-38**

***Love***

**Scripture:** *Luke 1:26-38 NRSV*

*(26)In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, (27)to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. (28)And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." (29)But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. (30)The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. (31)And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. (32)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. (33)He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." (34)Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" (35)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. (36)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. (37)For nothing will be impossible with God." (38)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.*

**Notes:**

1. Zechariah and Elizabeth become part of God doing something ***new***.
   1. There is no ***doubt*** whether the pregnancy is viable:
   2. God worked in ***unexpected*** ways in the Old Testament,
   3. Something ***new*** is coming.
2. Mary becomes part of this something-***new*** twist.
   1. A ***special*** ***baby*** is going to be born.
   2. This birth is wholly unexpected and ***unplanned***.
   3. Mary doesn’t ***hesitate*** in her obedience.
3. The declaration that Mary is highly favored and that God is with her is not solely for her but is meant for the ***entire*** ***world***.
   1. God is ***entering*** the world.
   2. God is ***faithful*** to humanity because God is ***love***.
   3. The Holy Spirit is key to this new understanding of ***family***.
4. We are loved by God and invited to be part of this new ***family***.
   1. God became ***Immanuel*** to be present with us wherever we are.
   2. “God with us” rings through all the preceding weeks of ***Advent***.
   3. God is with us that we may be with ***others***.
5. We are invited to ***bear*** Christ in the world
   1. we are called to the same level of ***discipleship***:
   2. We are called to bear Christ, revealing His love for ***humanity***
   3. We are called to sing words of defiant ***hope*** in the same way that Mary did.
6. Jesus loves ***me***, this I know, for the Bible tells ***me*** so.”
   1. ***I*** am loved of God.
   2. Christ is still God with us ***today***; breathing life into unexpected places.
   3. God is ***choosing*** to use ***us*** to carry that message of Christ into the world to bring hope, peace, joy, and love with ***us*** wherever ***we*** go

**Script:**

The love of a good mother is a wonderful thing; so wonderful, in fact, that a holiday has been set aside to celebrate mothers. I remember the times my mother would encourage me. Times where she would listen to me, and talk with me. Times when she would discipline me, I remember going to the lilac bush to pick the switch I would get my licking from. Kelly and I remember the white plastic well. Times when we would just be having fun, playing games, horsing around, all memories that we treasure in our hearts, especially at this time of year.

We all have memories of our mothers, unfortunately many of us no longer have our mothers. There seems to be a void left in our hearts; and these memories are all we have left; of the one who nurtured us, educated us, disciplined us, and loved us. I have heard it said that a Mother’s love knows no bounds, and many of us can and will attest to this.

Because of this, if we are not careful, we can read today’s text through that lens. We can read this text today through the lens of loving mothers. Two mothers who love their children, and through that lens we could miss the truly miraculous things about this text, truths that are much deeper than the love of two mothers.

To reduce this text to the love of two mothers, specifically through the love of Elizabeth and her relative Mary, we would in some sense place love in a box reserved for biological connection; missing the unbelievable ways in which this story disrupts biology altogether. Elizabeth being far too old to conceive, and give birth, and then raise a child, and Mary being a virgin, biologically impossible to be pregnant. But we would also miss something even greater; that love, true love, while not reserved to those with biological connection, is also not just about feeling or connection. Love has something very much to do with faithfulness. And while the faithfulness of a good mother might be a blessing for some, our ability to love is not dependent on our own faithfulness. Rather, it relies completely upon the never-ending faithfulness of God. Join with me as we share in the reading of our text today; *Luke 1:26–38*

*Luke 1:26-38 NRSV (26)In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, (27)to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. (28)And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." (29)But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. (30)The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. (31)And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. (32)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. (33)He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." (34)Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" (35)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. (36)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. (37)For nothing will be impossible with God." (38)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.*

*Zechariah and Elizabeth become part of the tradition of God miraculously doing something new.* “In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy” is an important beginning place for this text because the miracle of the conception of John the Baptist sets the stage for another miraculous conception. The sixth month is also past when a person can hide a pregnancy, and by the sixth month, there is no doubt whether the pregnancy is viable; the child’s movements and life can be felt.

The account of Elizabeth’s pregnancy echoes miraculous pregnancy narratives and God’s abounding faithfulness from the Old Testament. Sarah (Abraham’s wife) conceived in her old age. Hannah (Mother of Samuel) prayed fervently for a child at the temple. Samuel was dedicated as a Nazirite, which mean he could never drink wine. The angel Gabriel tells Zechariah that John is never to drink wine either. God worked in unexpected ways throughout the Old Testament, in order to illustrate God’s faithful love for the children of God, even though there are numerous examples that the children of God did not always return God’s faithfulness.

The story of John the Baptist’s conception seems to be an ending to the age of the prophets. Something new is coming. The narrative of John the Baptist’s conception seems to point forward to something new. John is going to be like Elijah the prophet; he is going to bring back people to the Lord; he is going to prepare the way for the Lord. Even Zechariah’s muteness seemingly points to something greater that is coming.

*Mary also becomes part of an old tradition with a something-new twist.* The announcement of Mary’s pregnancy (often called the Annunciation) in many ways also echoes the birth narratives from the Old Testament and also of Elizabeth’s pregnancy. There is an angel delivering a message, even repeating that well known phrase, “do not be afraid,” as so many others have done. A miraculous birth is going to happen, and a special baby is going to be born.

Among the echoes, it becomes clear that something different is happening here. The other birth narratives happen to couples, but this one is happening to Mary, through the power of God. The other birth narratives, while they acknowledge the work of God, don’t mention the Holy Spirit. There is a definite Trinitarian element to Mary’s conception; Father, Son, Holy Spirit. While many of the other women fervently prayed for years for a child, this birth is wholly unexpected and unplanned as well as initially undesired. The other women have had husbands. Mary is betrothed but not yet married, which puts her in a precarious position if she becomes pregnant; her fiancé has the right to have her stoned to death for adultery, or to divorce her at the very least, which would leave her at the mercy of her father.

The angel declares that Mary is highly favored, but we don’t see what this means. She seems to be an ordinary Jewish girl going about her life. Some scholars point to her name—Mary, which is a variation on the name Miriam, as evidence that she must have been raised in a devout Jewish community. Yet nothing about this reality would set her apart as “extraordinary” since others were part of this community as well. The custom for an engaged Jewish woman of that time was to live with her parents for a year while her bridegroom prepared their future home, so we can assume Mary still lived with her parents. The angel’s declaration that Mary is highly favored raises many questions, but we do get a glimpse of Mary’s faith. While this pregnancy may be undesired, she doesn’t seem to hesitate in her obedience. She responds in faithfulness to do what the Lord asks. Her declaration of obedience does not end in silence but results in a powerful song (the Magnificat) a song that praises the deep and abiding faithfulness of God through the ages.

*The declaration that Mary is highly favored and that God is with her is not solely for her but is meant for the entire world.* Immanuel—God with us—is being born into the world. We remember the words that “God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son.” Mary is a focal point of this story, but the true message of faithfulness and love is that God is entering the world.

The world has not been forgotten. God is breaking in. God is faithful to humanity because God is love. A great miracle of Christmas is that we are not forgotten. God draws near to us out of great love. Regardless of our faithfulness to God, God remains faithful to us. God breaks into the world in a new and unusual way, by becoming a baby, born of a virgin. Therefore, we can expect God to continue to enter the world in unexpected ways.

A new family is being forged. As we later see in Jesus’s teachings, he is ushering in a new understanding of family. The children of God used to be based on ancestral heritage, but Mary was not a descendant of a priestly lineage, nor does she bear the traditional markings of Judaism that men bear, since she is a woman (i.e., she is not circumcised). Family is usually based on biology, but biology doesn’t line up here since Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the key component to this new understanding of family. God’s love is for the entire world, so God weaves together a new family born of the Holy Spirit, and this new thing is already beginning the moment Jesus’s conception is announced by the angel.

*No matter who we are, where we come from, or where we are at this moment, we are loved by God and invited to be part of this new family.* God broke into the world in this new and unusual way, out of love for us because God desires to have a relationship with us and because God is faithful to us even when we aren’t faithful to God. God imagines more for us than we could ever imagine for ourselves.

God began something new, that we might be made new—because God loves us. Though the concept that God loves us is simple, it can get lost among our burdens. We often need to be reminded that God’s desire for us to be made new is because of God’s great love for us.

God became Immanuel—God with us—to be present with us wherever we are. This narrative of conception can be a difficult one for those awaiting similar miracles. But the true miracle and true hope here are not about the opening of wombs. They are about the presence and nearness of God. God loves us and chooses to walk with us where we are, even in heartache, drawing near to us and dwelling among us in the middle of it all. No matter what the desires of our hearts are, no matter our abilities, no matter where we came from or what we’ve done, we remain the beloved children of God.

“God with us” is a message that rings through all the preceding weeks of Advent. It is a great bridge as we enter into Christmas. It is our bridge of hope that we are not alone; of peace in the confidence that God is with us through all our circumstances; of joy in the knowledge that we are loved; of love beyond measure not because of who we are or what we’ve done but because of who God is. God is with us that we may be with others. We carry the promise of God’s presence into the world, to share with others the good news that they are also the beloved of God.

*As the beloved of God, we are invited to bear Christ in the world in order to reveal God’s love of others—in much the same way that Mary was.* Though we will not physically bear the Christ child, we are called to the same level of discipleship; to obediently follow after God to do hard things. We are called to bear Christ in the world, revealing His love for humanity to a people who may not realize they are loved. We know the hurt we have experienced in our own lives. Others are hurting too, and are in need of the message that not only does God love them, but God is also with them.

We are called to sing words of defiant hope in the same way that Mary did. Our obedience leads to a bearing of love and truth, but it doesn’t end there. This new family is the inbreaking of the kingdom of God coming to earth as it is in heaven.

The old refrain is simple: “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” But within that truth is something deep and powerful; abiding and radical love, and the formation of a new family that we get to be part! Though it is simple, it is sometimes easy to forget.,

We are the beloved of God. You are the beloved. Repeat after me, “I am loved by God.” But not only you because we know that God loved, and still loves, the world so much that he sent Jesus to be God with us, to be present with us in our joys and triumphs, and also to be with us in our pain and sorrow. To love us in the midst of all of the ups and downs of life.

Christ is still God with us today. The Holy Spirit is still in the business of breathing life into unexpected places. The kingdom is still breaking in on earth as it is in heaven. And God is choosing to use us to carry that message; to be the bearers of Christ into the world to bring hope, peace, joy, and love with us wherever we go, that the world might remember how God truly loves each of us and our neighbor’s as well, that the world may join us in this beautiful family united by the very breath of the Holy Spirit.