

“The Blessed Event”

**First Presbyterian Church
Pastor Dave Carlson
December 23, 2018**

Old Testament Lesson: Micah 5:2-5a

New Testament Lesson: Luke 1:46-55

It's a scene that happens in the early months of pregnancy, in obstetricians' offices across the country. An expectant mother and father are led into an examining room. The mother-to-be lies on her back and pulls up the lower part of her blouse, exposing her belly. The radiologist takes a device that resembles an oversized electric razor and slides it across the woman's abdomen. It emits a soft, buzzing noise. Looking at a computer screen on wheels, the medical technician swivels the screen around so the mother- and father-to-be can see it. "Look there!" And they look – and there, almost lost in the grainy image, is a tiny, beating heart. They squint and look some more: a scrawny leg becomes visible to their eyes, then an arm. A coil of umbilical cord connects to what must be the baby's belly. The head – chin bent downward to the chest – seems impossibly large. It's a modern miracle: the ultrasound of a fetus in utero.

Of course, ultrasound wasn't available to Mary and her cousin Elizabeth, those two very special expectant mothers at the beginning of the first century. Neither Mary's child Jesus, nor Elizabeth's child John, were visible to the world during the private moment these women shared rejoicing at the future awaiting them and all the people of every time and place.

So how did Mary know all those things she sings about in her song we just heard read – that the baby she carries will turn this world upside down and inside out in fulfillment of God's covenant with our spiritual ancestor, Abraham?

I mean, the things she says! So bold and dangerous! In a world where might makes right, money talks the loudest and riches carry the day, a world where in that day men were the ones who really mattered compared to women and children.

How can this young, unmarried woman – girl, really – say that her child will be the one to show the strength of the Lord God Almighty, scatter the proud, bring down the powerful, lift up the lowly, fill the hungry with good things, and send the rich away empty?!?

And what makes her think that's what the world needs? Oh, sure. We're all for the strength of the Lord God Almighty, as long as it's used to raise us up. And scattering the proud? – that's fine, as long as God overlooks our moments of self-righteousness.

How about bringing down the powerful and lifting up the lowly? Who could argue with that? I don't know. It depends what that means, bringing down the powerful? Don't we need powerful people in this world to keep the peace and protect the vulnerable?

And whose peace; which vulnerable? Peace in our country, sure, but what about the wars we're fighting overseas? Are they part of God's plan? It's hard to say for sure. We hope so, pray so.

How about the vulnerable? Yes, protect the vulnerable – in our families, our town. But what about vulnerable people outside our borders? Who's going to look after their safety amid such poverty, violence, and corruption? Should we even care in God's eyes?

At least we can all agree on filling the hungry with good things and sending the rich away empty, right? Until we think about what it is to be rich and the purpose of wealth. It's kind of subjective, isn't it? I am very rich compared to someone with no food in the house or roof over head. Do I really want to be sent away empty? Do you?

As you can see, it's a bold and dangerous thing – this coming of Jesus in fulfillment of God's covenant as declared by a lowly, unmarried, pregnant woman – I mean girl; she was young.

It's a bold statement because it requires us to look at who we truly are alongside our neighbors *and* enemies, friends and foes. And dangerous because none of us can stand on our own before God's divine judgment. Apart from God's mercy, we are all condemned, all guilty of being too rich, too powerful, too proud for our own good, and for the good of others.

It's like the guy who won \$3 million in the lottery. Immediately, he gave a quarter of it to charity. Now he has \$2,999,999.75. Now that's a guy who is too rich, too powerful, too proud and too funny for his own good and for the good of others. And again, seriously, it's subjective. Apart from God's mercy, we all fall under the same divine judgement.

Thank God that we have received more than the words of Mary's song. Thank God that her words were God's word, the Living Word taking its first true breath here on earth, a little baby named Jesus, a Son with whom God is well pleased, a King to reign in heaven above, a savior who comes that we might have life, and have it abundantly.

All of this and more is promised in the words of Mary when she sings, "His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation." How thankful are those who fear the Lord in service to Christ and obedience to God's will.

Blessed are you who turn away from proud thoughts in favor walking in someone else's shoes. Blessed are you who step down from your place of power to lift up a fellow traveler. Blessed are you who empty yourselves so that others may be filled with good things.

The birth of Jesus some two thousand years ago was truly a blessed event. And all the more blessed is the birth of Jesus today, in your heart, shaping your thoughts and actions, the use of your money and power where you spend your time and energy.

How did Mary know all those things she sang about in her song – that the baby she carried would turn this world upside down and inside out in the fulfillment of God's covenant with Abraham?

She knew because Mary knew God, she knew God's history with Israel, God's promises to Abraham, God's faithfulness to those who fear him – those who serve and follow the Lord.

Mary knew that God turns all things to God's good purpose, even the scariest, most uncomfortable, hardest thing you could image – such as being an unwed mother, in a patriarchal society, where women were little more than property, and babies were fragile promises of hope born into a world of poverty and need.

This is the miracle of Christmas, the gift of God to awaiting us under the tree this year. The gift revealed in scripture where it says, "... To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God." "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. ... From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace."

Merry Christmas!

PASTORAL PRAYER

Almighty God, the time of waiting is almost over. Like new parents eagerly awaiting the birth of a child, we impatiently wait with you for the birth of your Son.

We stand in awe, knowing what the birth of this particular baby means for our lives, and yet we are unable to fully comprehend the depth of your love for us.

We come before you in worship this morning hoping that our thoughts, prayers and songs of praise are pleasing to you.

We pray for those who need your protection and care in ways we can't imagine, whether because of meager financial means, serious health concerns, unbearable physical pain, debilitating conditions, or broken hearts – in grief, rejection, disappointment, or despair.

We pray, too, with those who rejoice, whether it be anticipating the birth of precious baby, delighting in the joy of a child's Christmas morning, enjoying the homecoming of children away at school or in from jobs out-of-town.

For all the ways you knit us together as family, we are thankful, Lord, and no less so for this family of faith.

So it is with one voice that we lift our prayers to you, using the words that you taught us, saying:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**