

12/20/2009

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY Stir up your power, O Lord, and come. Take away the hindrance of our sins and make us ready for the celebration of your birth, that we may receive your love and serve you always, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

THE OLD TESTAMENT LESSON Micah 5:2–5a

(The shepherd/king of Israel shall come from Bethlehem.)

2 "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." 3 Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor gives birth and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites. 4 He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. 5 And he will be their peace.

THE GOSPEL LESSON Luke 1:26–45

(Elizabeth greets Mary as our Lord's mother; Mary sings the Magnificat.)

26 In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, 27 to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. 28 The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

29 Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.

30 But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. 31 You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."

34 "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

35 The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. **36 Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month.** 37 For nothing is impossible with God."

38 "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

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

THE HYMN OF THE DAY "The Angel Gabriel From Heaven Came"
THE SERMON "God in My Life . . . Do You Believe it?"

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Luke 1

45 Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!"

INTRO - Keith Miller and Bruce Larson wrote a book in 1977 called, "The Edge of Adventure." These Episcopalian church leaders tell the following story.

The following letter was found in a baking-power can wired to the handle of an old pump that offered the only hope of drinking water on a very long and seldom-used trail across Nevada's Amargosa Desert: "This pump is all right as of June 1932. I put a new sucker washer into it and it ought to last five years. But the washer dries out and the pump has got to be primed. Under the white rock I buried a bottle of water, out of the sun and cork end up. There's enough water in it to prime the pump, but not if you drink some first. Pour about one-fourth and let her soak to wet the leather. Then pour in the rest medium fast and pump like crazy. You'll git water. The well has never run dry. Have faith. When you git watered up, fill the bottle and put it back like you found it for the next feller. (signed) Desert Pete. P.S. Don't go drinking the water first. Prime the pump with it and you'll git all you can hold."

By trusting the writer of the note, the person who arrived at this dry place was blessed with water, water to last. Trust that led to action, led to blessings. That's a description of faith.

I. If there is one person in the Scriptures who regularly shows a trusting faith in God that leads to humble actions of obedience, it is Mary.

A. In our story for today, Mary shows her faith twice, and is praised for her faith.

1. The angel Gabriel tells Mary she's going to have a child, in a way that no one has ever given birth to a child before. She doesn't say she doesn't believe, she asks how this can happen, and when told, "**God the Holy Spirit will work . . . With God nothing is impossible,**" she replied, "**Let it be to me as you have said.**" Mary trusted the angel, and trusted God who sent the angel, and became the mother of Jesus.

2. Mary was also told another improbable assertion. **Your cousin Elizabeth (who was called barren) is in her sixth month of pregnancy.** Who would have believed it. But Mary traveled to Judea to see her cousin because she believed. Her faith led to action.

3. Upon seeing Mary, Elizabeth greets her, her baby leaps in her womb, and she says, **44 As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. 45 Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!"**

B. The person who believed the water would prime the pump was blessed with more water. Mary, who believed God would work, was blessed not only by the work of God, but by receiving this blessing in her mind and heart. She was blessed as the mother of Jesus with peace, joy, life.

1. Mary trusted God, and then saw Him work.

2. Imagine, God works, and works in MY life!

3. God's work in her life not only blessed the present, but it gave her strength to face the future, and she would need it.

C. Today, the faith of Mary calls us to trust our Lord.

1. We are called to trust His compassion and love is for us, even when we don't feel loved.

2. We are called to trust His righteousness, His power, and His forgiveness, even when we have sinned.

3. When good seems impossible in life, we are called to trust that God can work and does in this difficult situation.

4. When we face death we are called to trust that God gives life, as a gift, through the love and sacrifice of his Son Jesus, through faith.

5. Faith doesn't just mean that God is, and works, but that He works in our lives as well.

II. However, life seems to call us to doubt that God exists, and that he loves, and that he works in our lives. The old story is told about a young boy facing a life threatening crisis, One night a house caught fire and a young boy was forced to flee to the roof. The father stood on the ground below with outstretched arms, calling to his son, "Jump! I'll catch you." He knew the boy had to jump to save his life. All the boy could see, however, was flame, smoke, and blackness. As can be imagined, he was afraid to leave the roof. His father kept yelling: "Jump! I will catch you." But the boy protested, "Daddy, I can't see you." The father replied, "But I can see you and that's all that matters." The Father may have been there, but the son couldn't see, so doubt was natural.

- A. We see trouble and pain, war and hatred, illness and death, and can be led to doubt God's love and goodness.
 - 1. What is worse is that God tells us that the pain and death in our lives come from our sin, from our selfishness, from our rebellion.
 - 2. While we can have trouble seeing God's love at times through the pain of our lives, we can understand our failure and sin. That is easy to believe.
- B. But, if faith receives the blessings of God's work and love, doubt keeps us from receiving it, even when it is there.
 - 1. If the boy doesn't jump, guess what, dad is still there.
 - 2. But, if the boy doesn't jump, he misses the safety of dad's arms.
 - 3. When we doubt we lose joy and peace that are offered us by God in His Son Jesus.
- C. Even when we doubt, because of life's pain, God is there. He is real, and He reaches out to us in power and love.
 - 1. God did conceive His son in Mary.
 - 2. Jesus was born, God's son, become a man.
 - 3. Jesus did die and win forgiveness for sinners who cause life's pain, people like me and you.
 - 4. Jesus did rise, and eternal life is real, and is there as the loving arms of God offered for you and for me.

III. There is one more truth about the faith to which God calls us. The man who believed the water would prime the pump and not only was he blessed with abundant water in a desert, he was a blessing to the next person who came along.

- A. Mary had reason to doubt the angel, but instead she believed.
 - 1. Mary was blessed as the mother of Jesus.
 - 2. You and I are blessed by Mary's example of faith, and by the Son of God she bore.
- B. When you trust God in this world of pain and sin, and live that faith, trusting in God's goodness in a world of pain, showing love in a world of hate, those around you are blessed too, as they see God work in your life.

CONCLUSION About two months ago I did a funeral for a member of our church, Ron McNeese. Ron was a pioneer, a long time Alaskan who could be very practical, and at time not always too trusting. He didn't always show faith, but those who knew him knew that one of his favorite sayings was from today's lesson, "Nothing is impossible with God." As I visited Ron's wife, Dee, who is usually in church, Ron came more and more to look forward to the Bible readings, the prayers, the sacrament. He would even call if I hadn't been there. As his illness got worse, this practical, sometimes crusty old man became more and more positive. He trusted God in his pain. Not only was Ron blessed, but I was blessed by his faith, as He was. **45 Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!** This Christmas, may your faith not only receive the gift of

God's son, and His peace and joy and life. May the faith God gives you, make you a blessing to those around you.