



Sunday Reflection

Ordinary Time

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 19 December 2021

Advent 4

We gather together in communion with the worldwide Church as we anticipate the arrival of Christ in our lives. Let us open our hearts and minds to the joy of the Word made flesh in our world.

Reflection for this week's Gospel teaching

"The child in my womb leaped for joy." Luke 1:44

An Illustration to set the scene

Joy is a wonderful thing.

It's one of those feelings that comes from deep within.

It is quite different from happiness, which we could describe as the culmination of a period of contentedness and well-being.

Happiness is drawn out, leisurely and slow, but joy is short, spontaneous and explosive, much like the word itself.

Joy erupts when we are perhaps experiencing some other feeling just seconds before: apprehension, dread, despair even.

When our sports team snatches victory from the jaws of defeat, or perhaps when the nerve-shredding question, "*Will you marry me?*" is answered with the glorious "*Yes!*"

In these kinds of situations, joy can burst forth and make us shout, leap into the air, even hug a stranger.

This incredible and impulsive reaction is just one of the miracles of the human condition.

Looking at the teaching of the Gospel

The joy of today's Gospel reading comes at a time of uncertainty and bewilderment for the two women central to the story.

It comes after the Angel Gabriel has visited Mary to tell her that she – young, poor, unmarried, from a backwater in Galilee – is to be the mother of God incarnate.

So too Mary's relative Elizabeth has recently discovered that she, though advanced in age and supposedly barren, is to give birth to a child who will be considered "*great in the sight of the Lord*".

When Mary enters Elizabeth's house and greets her, the child in Elizabeth's womb leaps for joy.

John, as yet unborn, makes his first great prophecy in recognising the Christ child.

That feeling between mother and child is shared as they become aware, through the Holy Spirit, that they are in the presence of something utterly removed from the everyday, something miraculous.

Now comes the next part of this encounter – Mary's song of praise.

Sensing the significance of what has just happened, Mary, though probably still reeling from recent events, begins to praise God.

Luke's telling of this story suggests that this was not scripted or planned, but is another spontaneous exclamation of joy at the wonder of God's working.

Her words echo Elizabeth's praise for Mary, in believing that God will fulfil his promises.

Many might expect God on earth would be born into a seat of power, perhaps to an emperor or a great royal family.

But God's power on earth is to be born to the lowliest of the lowly, into a land occupied by external military might.

This too gives Mary cause for joy – God on earth will come to be among us, not above.

Some may read the Magnificat and argue that Mary is boasting and glorifying herself, but it must be remembered that she is praising the miracle that is at work in her through the power of God.

Mary is actually showing great humility in acknowledging that it is only through God's grace that she is to be remembered for eternity.

How many of us could confidently assert that we would be the same?

How can we reflect on the application to our lives?

The encounter between Mary and Elizabeth is the first human encounter in Luke's Gospel where Jesus' destiny is foretold, the first glimmer that Mary's unborn son will be something special.

Of course with the benefit of two thousand years' hindsight it is easy to overlook the miracle of what happened to those women that day in the house of Zechariah.

Nevertheless, at a time of uncertainty, worry and possibly even dread, the unborn child and Elizabeth feel the eruption of joy in their hearts and literally leap and shout praise for the child who has come into their presence.

Sometimes, even at this time of commercial festive cheer, the world can feel a very oppressive, dark and daunting place, but the time of the Prince of Peace is approaching; the light of the world, who will cast out darkness, is coming – not with power and glory, but in the form of a defenceless child, thanks to the faith of a young woman who walked the path of obedience when it would have been easier and more convenient to do otherwise.

So feel that inexplicable feeling bubble up inside yourself, know that what is happening is beyond your understanding and let your heart leap for joy that the child of Bethlehem is coming into our presence.

“The child in my womb leaped for joy.” Luke 1:44

Please share your response to this reflection to Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God’ spirit move you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst we cannot meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

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