

BHBC Life Group notes

Rediscover Christmas

Advent Week 3: Finding Joy in Our Discouragements

13 December 2020

What fills you with joy?

Read: Luke 1:5-25

When you think of Advent and Christmas, Zechariah is maybe not the first person you'd necessarily think of. Zechariah was a priest, and the husband of Elizabeth, who gave birth to John the Baptist. Like Mary and Joseph, they were both visited by the Angel Gabriel, who told them that, despite Elizabeth being unable to have children, they were going to have a baby.

Zechariah was so shocked by this news that he didn't believe it, so as a consequence he wasn't able to talk until the baby was born! Zechariah had heard from God, via the angel, but struggled to believe what he had heard, because of his age.

Sometimes what we hear from God is uncomfortable or can feel challenging or unbelievable. I wonder if you have heard from God and how that made you feel?

Elizabeth was probably Mary's aunt. She was much older than Mary and was perhaps considered to be too old to have children and had given up hope of having any children of her own. For her, the inability to have children would have been a source of pain and sorrow and shame culturally in that day.

When Elizabeth found out she was pregnant, she kept herself isolated for five months. Mary visited her when she discovered she was also pregnant; Elizabeth was excited and felt blessed that Mary had come to visit her, for she knew she was carrying God's Son. Elizabeth later gave birth to a baby boy – John the Baptist.

How might Elizabeth have felt that she was chosen for this special task by God? What might it have been like for Elizabeth to be on her own for five months before having her baby?

Luke's retelling of Jesus's story begins with the events that lead up to Jesus's birth. Following Elizabeth's Holy Spirit inspired greeting of Mary the focus shifts from Elizabeth to Mary. Mary's response to all that has gone on in the preceding few days is a song of great hope and praise. Mary gives us the first glimpse of how different the world will be now that Jesus is about to arrive on the scene.

Read: Luke 1:46-57

What does Mary say was the reason for her praise?

What things does Mary compare and contrast in her song?

It's okay to be joyful and happy. Happiness and joy are sometimes used interchangeably in the Bible. They may have slightly different nuances like many synonyms do, but those

are often cultural and shifting. They are essentially different words for the same thing. Historically, great church theologians have not made a distinction between the two. The distinction we will make is not so much in the substance of happiness vs. the substance of joy, but in the object of happiness vs. the object of joy. Godly happiness and joy is a natural desire that God has placed within us as a reflection of His own joyful nature. **How can we reflect the joy of the Lord despite our circumstances?**

When was the last time you felt like you could say the things Mary said, but about your own life? When last did you feel like you could be called blessed?

Which of the patriarchs did Mary mention in her song? Why do you think Mary's response has a reference to Abraham in it?

We can choose joy. The Bible uses the word "rejoice". To rejoice is to return to joy. It's a choice and an action we can take to return to joy. **How can we, like Mary, turn what we believe to be true about God into action?**

God is turning the expected order of things on its head by bringing Jesus to earth. Where have you seen that be true in your own life?

Read: Genesis 22:17. The promise to Abraham was that his seed would out number the sand on the seashore. What can you do during Advent to introduce more people to who Jesus is?

Read: James 1:2-4; Nehemiah 8:10.

Let's rediscover Christmas this year by embracing joy, no matter what we're going through. Let's remember each day the source of our joy. Let's seek our happiness, not in the seasonal trappings and traditions around us, but by being refuelled constantly by the source of joy.

Reminder: During Advent we pause to remember that Jesus came once as a baby to announce the coming of the Kingdom of God. We also look forward to when Jesus will come back this time on the clouds to usher in the new heaven and the new earth.