

Holy Days of Joy
December 14, 2014

Luke 1:39-56

39 In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah, 40 and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. 41 And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit 42 and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! 43 And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy. 45 And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord." 46 And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, 48 for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden. For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed; 49 for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. 50 And his mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation. 51 He has shown strength with his arm, he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, 52 he has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree; 53 he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away. 54 He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, 55 as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his posterity for ever." 56 And Mary remained with her about three months, and returned to her home. (RSV)

You know that old song "It's the most wonderful time of the year, it's the hap-happiest season of all". This is the time and season of great JOY!

We hear joy in our scripture today time and time again. The baby, whom we know to be John the Baptist in Elizabeth's womb, leaps in joy when Mary speaks to Elizabeth. Elizabeth rejoices with her and celebrates the momentous occasion of the mother of the Lord coming to visit her. Mary responds also with joy in what is known in scripture as Mary's Song. Hear it again Luke 1:46-56. (Read Luke 1:46-56) It is only ten short verses but oh it tells the work of the Lord and how the people rejoice in God's love of them.

It is a song of great joy that revels in the coming birth of a child. We have already recalled Mary's fears of being the chosen one of God for this task. She has experience much of what Joseph had probably been feeling the anxiety over what God had called these two people to do. However Mary has moved past the point of peace and has reached the point of Joy and excitement about the coming experience. She is joyful over the coming child and it is evident throughout her song that she is filled with praise for God for the blessings she has been given. "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my savior" All the hope of the ages has been fulfilled and Mary has come to peace with what will and is happening. Now she is able to be joyful in expectation for the birth of God's son.

Advent is one of those times of year where we learn together about hope peace joy and love. We learn how these emotions and qualities were experienced by our biblical forbearers and we learn how we too can experience them.

We often consider joy to be exuberant, overflowing, excitement. We perceive people to be joyful when they are bouncing up and down on the balls of their feet, grinning from ear to ear and bubbling over with whatever they are joyful or happy about. I have always found it interesting that we celebrate the Sunday of Joy instead of the Sunday of Happiness. Most would interchange them and even the dictionary considers them synonyms. So what is the subtle distinction between them?

I finally got some of the dye out from under my fingernails from cookie icing and sprinkles. My kitchen is still a mess but what joy did we create together as a family, baking and decorating cookies and sweet goods for our friends! The girls giggled over and over again. More dough ended up on the floor or in our mouths than in the cookies. We had icing covered fingers and faces. Sprinkles still litter our floor. In spite of the mess and the chaos we created joy together. Chad and I are passing on the traditions of our families and embarking on our own traditions in many ways. We are building a wellspring of Joy.

Perhaps that is the distinction between Joy and Happiness though they are not mutually exclusive. Joy would not be possible without some measure of contentment and peace for where we are and what we are doing. Happiness can almost be fleeting a quick spurt of feeling or it can be a reflection of a deep inner joy that we are continually expressing.

Perhaps that is where Mary's song comes from. It is a song of rejoicing but it is also a reflection of deep contentment with what is happening to her and how her life will forever be changed. She is obviously excited by everything but it is not that she is going around telling everyone excitement. It is more simple and quiet. It is deeply reflective and introspective of her peace, it is Joy.

Yes, we are in the season of Joy but that joy is more felt in the good deeds we do, the love we share, the memories we make together. Sometimes joy is more reflective of our inner peace than we have ever given it credit for. It Joy does not always come in loud fanfares of trumpets. It is not always over the top. Sometimes it is being built upon and reflective of our past and our future together. Sometimes it is little more than a baby laid in a manger.

I close today with a song, a simple cover and rewrite of the 1984 Leonard Cohan song *Hallelujah* by a group called Cloverton. This Christmas version says a lot about the joy of the season.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=43OQi0KJC8g

Amen.