# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

 **“Peace”**

**Luke 1:26-38**

**December 9, 2018**

This morning we lit the candle of peace, reminding us of the peace that Jesus brings as he comes into the world. The prophet Isaiah declared that the child to be born would be the Prince of Peace. Jesus said to his disciples: “My peace I give you.” The question for you and me today is this: “Are we at peace?”

As you think about all that needs to be done between now and December 25, are you experiencing peace? Given the high expectations that most of us have for gift giving, family gathering, and meal making, do you sense a deep, inner confidence that every expectation will be met? The reality is that many of us feel anything but peace this time of year. The coming of the Prince of Peace seems to be more an occasion for crazy making than for calm serenity. What, then, is the peace that Jesus brings? Will we find it if we simply refuse to get caught up in the mad rush of the season? Or, is there something deeper available to us in the coming of Christ into the world? I invite you to turn with me to the second of four stories in Luke we are exploring during this season of Advent, found in Luke 1:26-38

In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. Gabriel appeared to her and said, “Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!” Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. “Don’t be afraid, Mary,” the angel told her, “for you have found favor with God! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!” Mary asked the angel, “But how can this happen? I am a virgin.” The angel replied, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God. What’s more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she has conceived a son and is now in her sixth month. For the word of God will never fail.” Mary responded, “I am the Lord’s servant. May everything you have said about me come true.” And then the angel left her.

How could Mary be at peace with the angel’s message? From a human perspective the timing is all wrong. One day in the future, yes, a child will be wonderful. But, not now – not now when she’s not married. What will Joseph say? What will her parents and his parents think? She will be an outcast in her village, assumed to have been unfaithful to her betrothed. Furthermore, what’s this about being pregnant while still a virgin? If just doesn’t make sense. Still, she accepts the angel’s word. She is willing to place her faith in God and to believe that the word of God will never fail.

At one level, at the emotional level, she must have been in great inner turmoil. Certainly she wouldn’t be feeling peaceful in the sense of being content and at ease. But, at a deeper level, at the level of faithful trust in God, she was at peace. She was at peace with God’s will for her, and she was at peace with God’s ability to do what he said he would do.

There are many stories like Mary’s in the Bible, stories of persons who are asked by God to do his will in a difficult circumstance. Take Moses, for example, who encounters God in the burning bush. God tells him to go to mighty Pharaoh and demand the release of God’s people. Here is Moses, minding his own business, living the quiet life of a shepherd, taking care of his family, and God shows up and asks him to set all that aside and put himself in harm’s way. Moses eventually did what God asked, not because it was easy or comfortable, but because he believed that God would do what he promised. Moses was at peace with God.

Then there is Jesus himself. The Prince of Peace feels anything but peaceful in the Garden of Gethsemane when he asks his Father to remove the cup of suffering from him, the cup that will take him to his excruciating death on a cross. Jesus doesn’t go to the cross because it feels good, but because he, like Mary and Moses before him, trusts God that he will do what he has promised. In that sense, Jesus was at peace with the cross.

Lauri and I had been married for only six months, and I was still in college, when she became pregnant. That was certainly not how we had planned to begin a family, and we did not feel at peace about the situation. Yet, deep down - and it did take us a little while to get in touch with that deeper reality - deep down we knew that God was in control. Our unplanned pregnancy, like Mary’s, raised a lot of questions and concerns, but in the end we were able to be at peace because we firmly believe Scripture when it proclaims: “God causes all things to work together for good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose.” This coming Tuesday, that unplanned and unexpected child, who we named Ryan, turns 37. He is the father of our grandson with another on the way. God was working his plan and his plan is for our good!

The Apostle Paul knew something about life and its ability to make us anxious and rob us of peace. In his letter to the Philippians, the fourth chapter, the sixth and seventh verse, he writes: “Don’t be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Thankfully, Paul doesn’t just say, “Don’t be anxious” and leave it at that. Have you ever shared your worries with someone and had them say, “Oh, don’t worry about it?” Is that really helpful? Does it make you feel any better? No, you need a way to address your worry so you can experience peace and be relieved of your anxiety. Paul gives us the way.

First, pray about it. Notice here Paul’s word “everything.” That means there is nothing too small to bring to God in prayer. What, after all, about our life would look big to God? Everything is small to him, so take it all to him. Second, add supplication which means, keep it up, over and over again. Don’t make it just a one-time prayer to God about a particular worry. As long as the worry persists, keep praying about it. Third, pray with thanksgiving which is the forward look of faith that thanks God for his answer before you actually see it. Confident in his promises, you know he hears and responds to your prayer.

Pray in this way, says Paul, and you will experience the peace of God, a peace which will guard your heart and your mind in Christ. In other words, your worry-producing circumstances, which have caused your heart’s troubled emotions and your mind’s frantic thoughts, will not keep you from finding rest in Jesus. Rather, God’s peace will keep you centered in Christ even as God helps you deal with your troubling circumstance.

Mary was at peace with God and gave birth to a Savior. Moses was at peace with God and led God’s people out of Egypt. Jesus was at peace with God and brought salvation to the world. May you and I be at peace with God and serve him faithfully, wherever he leads us.