# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

 **“Peace”**

**Luke 1:26-38**

 **December 4, 2022**

Last week we began our Advent sermon series with a story from Luke’s gospel about a Jewish couple named Zechariah and Elizabeth, and their hope for a child. This morning we look to the second of Luke’s four stories leading up to the birth of Jesus. Found in Luke 1:26-38, it is the story of the angel’s message to Mary.

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.

“Confused and disturbed.” These are the words that Luke uses to describe Mary’s initial response to the angel’s message. As you and I consider what is going on in the world around us, and as we think about what’s going on in our own personal world, do we find ourselves confused and disturbed? This is supposed to be the season of peace, as we heard earlier in the service when we lit the candle of peace, but are we at peace this morning? If nothing else, given the high expectations that most of us have for gift giving, family gathering, and meal making, the season seems 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?

From a human perspective, Mary could hardly be at peace with Gabriel’s message. Having a child some day in the future after she and Joseph were married would be wonderful, but not now. What will Joseph say? What will her parents and her future in-laws think? It will be assumed that she has been unfaithful to her fiancée. Furthermore, what’s this about being pregnant while still a virgin? It just doesn’t make sense. Still, she accepts the angel’s word. “May everything you have said about me come true.”

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 her faith in God, she was at peace. She believed in a good God, and she was his humble and obedient servant.

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 – 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 God’s Word when it proclaims: “God causes all things to work together for good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28). Next Sunday, that unplanned and unexpected child, who we named Ryan, turns 41, and he is the father of two of our grandchildren. God was working his plan, and his plan was 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, he writes: “Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7).

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 doesn’t just say, “Don’t worry.” He gives us the way to move beyond worry.

First, pray about it, thereby inviting God into your worry. Notice that Paul says to pray about everything. That means there is nothing too small or insignificant to bring to God in prayer. Whatever is bothering you is legitimate reason for prayer. Second, when you pray, thank God for all he has done. The God who has been faithful in your life in the past is the same God who will be faithful to you today and in the days to come.

Pray in this way, and you will experience the peace of God. Your worry-producing circumstances, which have caused your heart’s troubled emotions and your mind’s frantic thoughts, will not be able to keep you from finding rest in Jesus. Rather, God’s peace will focus your heart and mind on Christ, all the while God is helping you to deal with your troubling situation.

A confused and worried Mary experienced the peace of God in the midst of a very hard situation and gave birth to the Savior. May you and I experience the peace of God this Advent Season, prayerfully bringing to him our confusion and worry, while expressing our gratitude to him for all his blessings in our lives.