

**“Rejoicing in God’s Great Plans for Us,”**  
**based on Luke 1:39-55, David Jahnke, 12/18/11**

I want to follow up last week’s sermon regarding great things God has in store for us. Mary sings of the great things the Mighty One has done for her. And she then lifts up the unfinished ministries of the Messiah growing within her, as if they were already complete! Trusting that God has started great things within us, that these things are already completed in his time, and, that they are therefore ahead is what Advent is about.

Living into the great things depends on the recognition and support of family on three levels: home, church and society. And today I will link three virtues to these levels: 1. love at home 2. faith in the church, and 3. justice in society with each level and virtue supporting and challenging the others to grow into the great things of God.

God came to Mary with a vision that led to faith and a call to justice in her song of praise. And the love and mercy of her extended families were critical to that vision becoming a reality. Her fiancée Joseph was ready to divorce her for her seeming sin but instead he trusted the angel who told him that the Holy Spirit had brought forth the life deep within Mary.

Mary then went to her cousin Elizabeth who was also filled with the Holy Spirit and rejoiced at the new life within Mary. Elizabeth too believed in her, calling her blessed time and again, rather than scorning her for possible past sins.

So we have to decide what to focus on in our families— past sins and annoyingly persistent sins, or new life and light within. Christmas is a perfect time for us to hear of families ridding themselves of judgment and doubt toward each other and instead being filled with mercy and love-- rejoicing and believing in each other.

We know this is not easy. At the center of this passage and in the center of these women was the work of the Spirit and the conception and recognition of Christ. So joy, praise, and mutual blessings all depend on the conception of Christ within our hearts and the *concept of* Christ governing our minds and relationships. And this Christ-centered joy-filled life comes with the kind of trust exhibited by Mary, Joseph, and Elizabeth-- trust that God has

come into our and our loved ones hearts and minds. And God will never let them go, and neither, therefore, will we.

These are the binds of family love which come to life at Christmas. The sharing of time, the giving, the joy and beauty we all experience at Christmas are the foundation of a great life. And even when sin makes things go awry in our family, the power of love rooted in shared flesh and blood still binds us.

The model of love keeping us connected no matter what becomes more challenging as we move up to the level of the church. But so many families are really struggling. So it is critical to have an additional family providing support, especially when the binds of love break apart. The kind of love, grace and truth which is sometimes missing in the home must be extended to the hurting within the church.

And in the church, you have the added dimension of faith which is often not central in the home. In modern times, faith is a sensitive and often times divisive rather than uniting factor in families.

So a couple of great things happen here at church: 1. persistent grace-filled love and support are extended from the home setting and practiced on a broader level; and 2. faith, which has a more natural setting in the church, is modeled and encouraged so that it can be extended in both directions-- to the home and to society.

We see this in the first person ever to worship the Christ— Elizabeth. She not only loved her cousin Mary, she encouraged her faith, saying to her, “Blessed are you who have believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to you!” And Mary returns the favor, singing a song of praise.

Imagine the theological conversations that the two of them must have had over the three months they stayed together. The one who was barren for so long, suddenly pregnant at the same time that her much younger cousin is pregnant by way of the Holy Spirit— and the two of them pregnant with two of the greatest prophets to ever live! I do not think their mothers were lacking in spiritual and theological depth! They were conceiving Christ in their minds; they were thinking and talking about who God is and wondering about what God had in store for them and they raised their children as prophets accordingly. Here in church is where we are called to wonder

about God with an extended family who will rejoice with us about divine possibilities.

Finally, moving up to the level of society, we see in Mary's Song a call to justice which encourages the success of the family and institutions; and yet a justice which transcends parochial love and faith and seeks to make up for their failures.

Mary sings about the Lord bringing down the proud and lifting up the humble; filling the hungry and sending the rich away empty. These are exactly what Christ did—breaking down two tribalistic tendencies: 1. caring for just me and mine and 2. dismissing and condemning individuals and faith communities who have not rightly known or failed to embody love and truth. Christ and the early church did the opposite for the outsider—Christ for the Jewish sinner, the early church for the unclean and unknowing Gentiles—they embraced them, cared for them and drew them into the great things of God. This is what just societies must do through strong public education, health care, and welfare to work programs that teach, support and hold people accountable to the great ways of God.

In conclusion, God has great things ahead for you-- a deeper realization of love in your homes, a deeper realization of faith through your church life, and a deeper realization of justice as you serve your communities. These things are already completed for you in Christ. Put him at the center of your home, your faith and your approach to the world and rejoice in the great things God is doing.

To the mighty one who has done great things for us-  
the one whose mercy extends to all who revere him from generation to  
generation,  
the one whose name is holy...  
to God on high who has reached down low  
be all the power and the glory now and forevermore.

