

Sermon – 12-23-2018
Fourth Sunday of Advent – Luke 1
By
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Today, we encounter John the Baptist again, but he's a little bit younger than when we met him two weeks ago. At this point, he's about negative 3 months old. He's still in utero, contained in the womb of his mother Elizabeth. Earlier in this chapter, his coming birth was announced to his father Zechariah in the holy of holies, the inner sanctum of the temple. Of course, he didn't believe it, and so he couldn't talk throughout the entirety of his wife's pregnancy. Both Zechariah and Elizabeth are not in the prime child-bearing years, shall we say. And yet, they conceive this child. And then one day, about six months in to her pregnancy, her relative Mary shows up. Now, we don't know how exactly Elizabeth and Mary are related. But they must have known of each other, because when Gabriel tells Mary that Elizabeth is pregnant, she knows how to find her, all the way in Judea, about 80 to 100 miles away.

And when Mary arrives, with probably no advance warning, and all she has to do is speak, the negative 3 month old John the Baptist leaps inside his mother. Those of you who are mothers probably know what this felt like

to Elizabeth. Nothing says love like feet in the ribs. But it's not just John the Baptist who has a reaction to Mary showing up. Elizabeth does too. We need to notice that Elizabeth had no idea Mary was coming, didn't know that Mary had been spoken to by Gabriel, and Mary is literally five days pregnant. And Luke tells us that Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit. And unlike her husband who is unable to speak, she is able to powerfully and loudly proclaim the work of God, found inside the womb of Mary.

Is this us in the presence of Christ? Do we do this in the presence of Christ? We say that every time we gather in worship, or fellowship, or Bible study, Jesus is present among us. So, do we react this way? I would have to certainly say no, or not most frequently. We are *stoic* Scandinavian Lutherans, after all. Everything is done decently and in good order. Portrayals of one of the most influential renewers of the Norwegian church in the 19th century was Hans Nielsen Hauge, and every portrait that I've ever seen of him has him looking like the most *dour* man alive. We don't raise hands. We don't shout, unless it's to tell someone to plug in the coffee pot. And we kind of look down on people that do this. I'm not immune: I remember being at a church gathering, and looking funny at a woman who was singing and waving a scarf around.

And yet, here we have the mother of John the Baptist, and John the Baptist himself, pre-birth, jumping around and proclaiming loudly the word of the Lord. Why do they do this? For the pure *joy* of the Lord. They know that salvation has come to them. They know that the promised Messiah is truly on the way. That promise even reaches a child who hasn't even been born yet. That promise came through hundreds, if not thousands of years, and now is standing before Elizabeth and John, in the form of a probably 14-year-old girl, who is only 5 days pregnant. And I love Elizabeth's final sentence in verse 45: Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!

Because not only is she talking about Mary, she is also talking about herself, and she is also talking about you. Because the promises that God made to Elizabeth, Mary, John, Zechariah, to the Israelites are the same promises that he made to you: a Savior will come. They were lucky enough to be there at the time in which that promised Savior came. We are lucky enough to live in a time in which the promised Savior has come, and has promised to come again. This is our blessing. This is our hope. This is our joy! Christ has come to this earth, to go through death and resurrection, to bring you forgiveness and eternal life. When you know that joy, nothing else is more important. And that joy shows. One of my favorite

ways this joy comes out happens right in this sanctuary on a regular basis. During our traditional services, I stand in the front and sing the Gloria along with you. Many of you are good Scandinavian Lutherans, singing, but not overly so. But then, I look over to Aase. She has lived with the Lord 94 years. She has seen difficult days, and happy days. She has seen the fulfillment of the promises of God in her life. And when she sings the Gloria, she *sings* it. I can't even replicate the smile that comes across her face as she sings her praises to the God who has forgiven her, delivered her, and will raise her on the last day. That is the joy that we have been given by Christ. And that is what we celebrate on this day and every day. AMEN.