

Discussion Notes

The Peace of Jesus and the Joy that it brings (Luke 1.39-56)

December 4, 2016

Rikk Watts

The angels told the shepherds that Jesus' arrival was "good news of great joy for all people". Why is this such good news? To whom and how far does it reach? This series explores these questions through the lens of Jesus' birth in Luke's Gospel.

Gratefulness

- Humans are forgetful, we tend to take things for granted.
- We can often find help for our deepest emotional and psychological trouble in gratitude.
- Christmas is a difficult time of year for many because of the messy stuff in life.
- To cope with suffering, we can turn our attention to the beauty all around us, and remember it is a token of God's love. Give thanks to God.

Deep calling out to deep

- A recent UBC study scanned the brains of participants speaking in tongues. When speaking in tongues, ancient parts of the brain that experience hardly any activity light up like a Christmas tree.
- This experience of "deep calling out to deep" (Ps. 42.7) is what we see in Elizabeth's cry of praise when she greets Mary (Lk. 1.39-45).
- Understandable that Mary would go to Elizabeth, who else could understand her situation if not the barren one made pregnant in her old age?
- Elizabeth could not have possibly "known" about what was going on in Mary. Her deepest instincts and being cry out from within her.
- "Fruit of the womb"—no upstairs/downstairs universe. God involved in human experiences. Pagan philosophers wanted ideas and arguments. Thinking is important, but the Gospel is also a matter of power and Spirit (1 Thes. 1.5).
- "Blessed"—need to have an experience that makes you want to say it to understand it.
- Elizabeth and Mary demonstrate humility, they take no credit for what is happening. God is at work and they give Him the glory.
- Elizabeth doesn't use Mary's name, she says that the one who *believes* is blessed.
- Our right response to the powerful movement of God is belief.

The Magnificat (Luke 1:46-56)

- Mary is most likely around 12 years old. Since she is steeped in God's word from the synagogue, it is no surprise her response is full of scriptural allusions.
- She starts with a deep emotional response rejoicing in God her savior.
- She points out God's use of and care for the humble, the weak, and the small.
- This song is not a grand nationalistic narrative. It is her personal expression of what God has done in her life.

- Not a boast about her personal spirituality.
- She praises God’s holiness.
- “Mary” is a name used only one other time in scripture, the Hebrew “Merriam” Moses’ sister. Scholars debate the meaning but usually land between “rebellion” and “well-nourished one”. This ambiguity is probably why the name was unpopular.
- Luke may intend to highlight her name as an indication of the state of Israel at Mary’s time—rebellious with their hearts far from the Lord (hence John’s coming to “turn many hearts”)
- Like in the Garden after the Fall, and the Exodus after the golden calf incident, God consistently shows mercy to those in rebellion. His holiness is expressed in mercy.
- “Mighty Arm” language harkens back to God’s victory of Pharoah—the “lord of the mighty arm”—in the Exodus.
- She sings of the hungry being fed. The other meaning of “Mary”—the well-fed one.
- Rebellion turned into joy by believing.
- In places where life is hard, people celebrate loudly the character of God revealed by this song.
- They recognize we don’t need another social program to fix things, we need to reconnect to the story God has for us and live in His power.

Then...

- Elizabeth and Mary don’t start an incredible world-changing ministry after this experience...
- Mary visits with Elizabeth and then goes home.
- Right, proper, and good to have powerful experiences of “deep calling out to deep” and return to home with grateful hearts.
- These experiences are meant to create gratitude and generosity in us, for often “burdened with gifts we are no longer grateful.”
- Let us be grateful for the great things God has done and will continue to do in and through us.

Discussion Questions

- What are some ways you experience “deep calling out to deep”? What things do you feel awakens parts of your soul that are often left sleeping?
- What things have started and/or strengthen your belief?
- What are the challenges and obstacles to making space for gratitude and thanksgiving in your life?
- How does expressing our gratefulness to God benefit us? What about expressing gratefulness to our closest loved ones? To the others who we interact with at work, church, and play?