

Advent 4 - The Incarnation

Read Luke chapter 1, verses 24 – 56

Some Background:- Remember that the scene of the action is “*a town in the hill country of Judah*” (verse 39). The home of Elizabeth and Zechariah was not in a big metropolis. It was in a small rural community where everyone would know everyone else’s business! No T.V., i-pads or i-phones for communication, only word of mouth, local gossip. Having lived in small communities most of my life, I know that it is impossible to keep anything secret for very long! Verses 24 – 25:- “Just fancy, Elizabeth expecting a baby at her age! Zechariah is getting on a bit as well! I wonder how she’ll manage, I mean . . .” And into this “*town in Judea*” comes Mary with the glorious annunciation still ringing in her ears.

Verses 26 – 38:- The angel Gabriel came to Mary in the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy. To the question by Mary in verse 34, Gabriel not only gives a clear answer but follows it up with a “sign”. The barren Elizabeth is also expecting a son for “*with God nothing will be impossible.*” (verses 36 - 37)

Verses 39 – 45:- And “*In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country.*” It reads as though she did not waste any time in going to talk to with “aunt Elizabeth”. How she travelled we do not know, but it was a journey of 50 to 60 miles from Nazareth, down through Samaria and into Judea. We can speculate about the relationship between Elizabeth and Mary! The easiest answer is that Elizabeth was the sister of the mother of Mary. The relationship was not on the men’s side, because Joseph was of the house of David, whereas Zechariah was a Levite.

Certainly, when Mary heard what Gabriel had to say about Elizabeth, she would realize that here was someone who would understand!

Verses 39 – 45:- Here we find that, not only was Zechariah a prophet, so was Elizabeth! “*When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit . . .*”. (verse 41). What a blessing for Mary! The confirmation of the words of Gabriel comes with Elizabeth’s salutation. This was not just a human reaction from aunt Elizabeth. It was a reaction from the unborn baby. “*As soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy.*” (verse 44). The prophetic work of the great Forerunner begins before he is born!

Elizabeth and the unborn John are the first to recognise the Lordship of the Child to be born of Mary. And Mary’s response is the familiar Magnificat!

Mary would be familiar with scripture and it is natural that the words of the “Song of Hannah” (see 1 Samuel chapter 2, verses 1 - 10) would come into her mind as the Holy Spirit caught up her and Elizabeth in praise and worship. Two ordinary country women who were blessed and used by the Lord God in His plan of Salvation. In the words of the Magnificat, we find once again, that the coming of the Christ Child was to be the fulfilment of the promise made “to Abraham and his posterity for ever”. (verses 54 - 55).

The glory of the Lord was to be revealed. Not in works of power, but in the birth of a child.

A choice of readings for Christmas Day:-

Luke 2, verses 1 – 20: Ordinary people ordered around by the Government! Accommodation problems, although the word translated as “*inn*” most likely refers to the ‘house-place’. Think Devon long house, with Mary and Joseph having to use the end usually reserved for the sheep/cattle. Joseph, son of David, would surely have had relatives in Bethlehem who would be obliged to offer what ever was available.

John 1, verses 1 – 17. Why not read both Luke and John, and wonder at the gracious love of God for His world! - (John 3, verse 16)

With our love and prayers for a Blessed Christmas and a more peaceful and happier New Year!

Terry Brighton 24 / 12 / 2020 A short break now. We will be looking at the Book of Joel in the New Year.