

Sunday, December 13, 2020 ADVENT 3

Isaiah 9:2-7 Luke 1:39-56

Filled with Wonder and Joy

We continue to follow the story of Kevin McAllister who was left behind by his family in the movie "Home Alone". We have observed his freedom to do what he wanted, his ability to protect his home from robbers and then we realize he is now searching for the meaning of Christmas. Kevin meets his neighbour whose reputation is hard and cold and so when Kevin meets him while getting a toothbrush he is fearful of this neighbour who is also seeking something in his life. As the movie continues Kevin becomes curious about the music he hears and enters and listens to a choir singing. While he gazes in wonder at the beautiful sanctuary he also sees his neighbour and becomes afraid. But Kevin also wonders why the man is watching a rehearsal instead of sharing in the worship service. We then learn that a relationship problem exists between the man and his son and the only way to listen and watch his granddaughter sing is to attend the rehearsal. Kevin's simple advice to the man is to reach out and talk to his family instead of wondering what might be wrong. Kevin also wonders about his family and realizes that he misses them all- even his siblings and cousins, aunts and uncles. And he too is searching for the joy that comes at Christmas for he is all alone.

Windsor Essex will enter code grey lockdown starting on Monday. This means that family members are restricted to small gatherings, schools will be closed with children and youth learning online, and we as a church will not be having in person service next Sunday. In several conversations these past days many people have stated, we knew this would happen because people are not doing what they need to do for everyone's health. There is too much cross border traffic and we need to just flatten the spike in cases being reported in this region. People are concerned about what will happen to their traditions of celebrating Christmas and looking to blame people for the circumstances in which we find ourselves. But let us just consider this for a moment—there is reason to celebrate Christmas because it is not tied up in packages or decorations, but what is found in the hearts of people who know and experience the wonder and joy of Jesus Christ in their life.

The prophet Isaiah wrote many years before Jesus' birth that the people of his time and generation were living in darkness. What he stated may be said of our time and generation as well because many people of this world have been walking in darkness and are searching for someone to light their way, to show them how to live and love. And if you believe in the One

who came to light our lives, Jesus is the one who will make a difference. Each week we have marked the season of Advent by lighting candles. As Advent continues, we will increase the light which shines in order to eliminate the darkness, to take away shadows of uncertainty and to illuminate those hidden places in our hearts which need to be filled with God's Spirit. Isaiah stated that when the people see this light there will be joy. There will be more joy than what is experienced at the time of harvest. Because God planned that the Coming King in the Infant yet to be born would be the one upon which all authority rests.

When we think of the Infant in the manger are we thinking about Jesus this way? Or are we wondering more about who he really is? Our reading from Luke 1 is the story of the Visitation of Mary to her close relative and friend Elizabeth. Upon entering Zechariah and Elizabeth's home, it was Elizabeth's child who jumped inside of her. Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit and with joy and blesses Mary. But it is her greeting that probably got Mary to thinking that what the angel told her was really going to happen! Elizabeth states Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why has this happened to me- that is why has the mother of my Lord come to me? She told Mary that her baby was kicking it up with joy inside her. Just what would cause Elizabeth to be so joyful? Was it because both she and Mary were chosen by God to be the mothers of sons who would bring about change in the world—one to prepare the people and the other to become the Saviour? Was it because Elizabeth knew that Mary was to bear a very special baby in that he would save His people. Elizabeth called Mary the mother of my Lord. What did Elizabeth understand about Mary's baby that maybe Mary was not fully sure.

But then Mary breaks out into song- which has become known as the "Magnificat" (based on the Latin translation of the first line--"Magnificat anima mea Dominum" translated as "My soul magnifies the Lord". Mary proclaims the Lord's greatness with characteristic humility and grace. Mary also sings of the essential link between humility and holiness. Just as God has "regarded the lowliness of his handmaid" and "has done great things" for Mary in making her the Mother of his Son, so too "he has put down the mighty from their thrones and lifted up the lowly. Through Mary's song we learn of her faith in God, her trust in what will occur, and the joy she feels from within her very being as the Mother of the One who as promised for generations to be the Saviour. The joy Mary has is shared with Elizabeth and as faithful women they know that what God has planned for them in their life will not be easy. But their faith will get them through.

The joy of giving birth to a baby was truly on Mary and Elizabeth's minds. Like Elizabeth, Mary's birth plan was to be at home with family close by. But this was not what occurred for she

laid her newborn baby in a manger as stable animals watched. But God had made the birth of Jesus spectacular in itself—with a star, angels and shepherds. Often pictured in nativity scenes is Mary filled with joy but also wondering and pondering over her child about what his future will involve. Yet there is joy in her heart as God had chosen her to be the mother of the Saviour and she was filled with joy! Maybe she also wondered what those words of Isaiah meant as she rubbed her belly prior to his birth. Just what “authority will rest upon him, as he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

During these days of covid19 pandemic, lockdown and uncertainty, we need to learn how to respond with joy. We are facing many life’s trials and we must begin with a conscious awareness that God is at work in our lives and that He has a tangible purpose for why we may be experiencing these trials. Have you ever wondered this in these last 9 months? Is God up to something with this global pandemic? Maybe God is asking us to do something important. That is, if we have put our faith and trust in Jesus Christ as our own personal savior, and if we believe that His Word teaches us that God is at work in our lives, then we will come to the logical conclusion that trials, suffering, and difficult times in our lives are ultimately designed by God and that He has a specific purpose for us. Now is not the time for complacency and sitting back and letting these moments of telling Christ’s story go by. It is the time to be sharing just what Jesus’ birth means to you. It is the time to say that God is alive and working in us. We are not always clear as to what His purpose is, but because we have had time to sit, reflect and seek God’s presence we have a story to tell like never before in this century. Christ is born today. There is joy, in the birth of Jesus the Christ. And we have an opportunity to respond to circumstances outside of ourselves with inner contentment and satisfaction, because we know that God will use these experiences to accomplish His work in and through our lives.

As we prepare for Christ’s birth, we can choose to prepare and respond with joy, even during times of trials and sufferings. This is because joy is a choice and it comes from the Lord for He alone is the originator of true joy. We don’t have to produce it or drum it up on our own. After all, Joy is one of the promises of Christmas given in the Baby Jesus. When Kevin helps the neighbour to reconcile with his son, there is joy experienced by all involved. Where will you find joy this Advent/ Christmas? Or will you be complacent to let the season go by without truly experiencing the wonder and joy of knowing the Baby in the manger and the Christ of the cross?

Let us reflect on these ideas as we share together in prayer:

Holy God of grace and mercy we praise you for your promise to us in the Baby who was born in a stable and became the risen Christ. We praise you with joy from within. Help us to share this joy knowing that this Christmas there is a need for it in the hearts of many people. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.