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Our Saviour Lutheran Church
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Advent 4

Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. Amen.

So, sisters and brothers in Christ, time is getting short.

As I noted in our announcements, today is the fourth Sunday in Advent.

And in only a short while then, it will be Christmas.

In fact, Friday night is Christmas Eve, and I am hopeful to see all of you and your families that evening when we celebrate our Savior's birth.

But, before we get to Christmas, we still have a few more days in Advent.

And before we get to the text in Scripture about the birth of Jesus, we still have our text on this last Sunday in Advent.

And our text today is a text we have heard many times before.

It is the text of what is called the *Magnificat*.

It is the text of that song that Mary sings when she visits her relative Elizabeth.

Yes, Mary is visited by the angel Gabriel, and Mary becomes pregnant by the Holy Spirit.

And then Mary sets out to visit Elizabeth.

And when Mary arrives and enters the home of Elizabeth, Mary bursts into song, singing, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."

Today, we heard the *Magnificat* not only in the Gospel reading...

But we also heard the *Magnificat* chanted as our psalm this morning.

And in a little while we will sing the *Magnificat* as our hymn of the day.

Yes, we can't get enough of the *Magnificat* today.

And today, on this fourth Sunday in Advent, I want us to focus on the first few lines of the *Magnificat* where hear these words.

“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit REJOICES in God my Savior.

And it never dawned on me until recently the importance of those few words: “my spirit rejoices.”

“My spirit rejoices.”

Why does Mary’s spirit rejoice?

Is it because she has been chosen by God, and because she has conceived a child, and because that child will be none other than God’s own Son? Yes, I think that is it.

Yes, Mary has been blessed threefold.

God has taken notice of her. God has reached out to her via his angel Gabriel.

And God has overshadowed Mary with his Holy Spirit, such that Mary conceives a child.

And God has not just blessed Mary with a child, but Mary carries in her womb Jesus the Lord.

So there are many reasons why Mary should be rejoicing.

But, the reason for Mary’s rejoicing may be even simpler than all that.

For when the angel Gabriel appeared before Mary to announce that she would conceive and bear a child.

When Gabriel first appeared to Mary, he simply said to her, “Greetings, favored one!”

Another way, and probably the more accurate way, to translate the Greek here is “Rejoice, favored one!”

Rejoice, favored one.

The word in Greek for “Rejoice” is *chaire*.

The word *chaire* is in the imperative verbal form of the Greek word *chairō*, “I rejoice.”

In other words, the angel Gabriel COMMANDS Mary to rejoice.

And so, what does Mary do when she visits Elizabeth, she bursts into song, singing, “My spirit rejoices.”

Of course Mary’s spirit rejoices.

She has just been COMMANDED by God’s word through the angel Gabriel to rejoice.

So Mary may have been rejoiced because she was blessed to be recognized by God and not only recognized by God but blessed to conceive a child, and not only conceive a child but blessed to bear Jesus the Lord.

These are all good reasons to rejoice. But most especially, Mary was commanded by God to rejoice, by means of the angel Gabriel.

PAUSE

Now this interpretation of Mary’s rejoicing is further supported by the John’s reaction in our text today.

When Mary greets Elizabeth something interesting happens.

Now Elizabeth is pregnant with John the Baptist.

And so the text says, “When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting...” which we assume is the same Greek greeting *chaire*...

When Elizabeth hears Mary’s greeting, the child leaped in her womb.

And Elizabeth then says, “As soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy.”

In other words, John the Baptist rejoices in Elizabeth’s womb.

Why? Because he has heard Mary’s greeting.

John the Baptist has heard Mary’s greeting, has heard the command himself: *chaire*, rejoice.

Just as Mary rejoices when the angel Gabriel commands Mary to rejoice (*chaire*), and so Mary then sings the Magnificat: “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit REJOICES in God my Savior” ...

Just as Mary rejoices when she is commanded to rejoice, so in like fashion John the Baptist rejoices when Mary commands Elizabeth (and John) to rejoice (*chaire*).

PAUSE

But so what?

What relevance does this have?

I mean what does this have to do with the price of eggs in China?

Well, it may just be that right here in chapter one of Luke’s Gospel, Luke is making a sort of commentary on a common greeting in everyday ancient Roman society.

You see, in the Greek speaking eastern half of the ancient Roman Empire, how people would greet one another was with the words *chaire*, or *chairete*, if greeting more than one person.

In short as people were greeting one another saying *chaire/chairete*, people were in effect commanding each other to rejoice.

To a Roman’s ear, as people greeted each other in everyday life, it could be heard as “Rejoice,” “Rejoice,” “Rejoice.”

But Luke in our gospel reading today is wont to say that there is a reason why people in the everyday Roman world are commanding each other to rejoice, whether they realize it or not.

Luke is saying, why we greet, that is command, each other to rejoice is because God has blessed with world with a Savior named Jesus Christ.

So Luke is telling his community that that everyday common greeting *chaire/chairete* has been instituted by God, because God wants the world to rejoice in the birth of the Savior Jesus Christ.

This is what I think we are to take, at least in part, from our gospel passage today.

Elizabeth (and John) are greeted, are commanded by Mary to rejoice, and John *in utero*, rejoices.

Mary had been greeted, commanded by the angel Gabriel to rejoice, and Mary sings the *Magnificat*, saying “My spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”

PAUSE

In some way it is like the greetings we hear happening all around us right now.

People are greeting one another with the words, “Merry Christmas” or “Happy Holidays.”

“Merry” and “Happy” of course carry the same sense of rejoicing.

Unfortunately, I don’t know if our contemporary society necessarily associates the “rejoicing” of this season with the birth of the Savior Jesus Christ.

Underneath all the commercialism surrounding the holidays, maybe we do.

But it takes a lot of wading our way through it all to get there, if in fact we ever do.

The other thing about Luke’s connection of *chaire* (Rejoice) to the birth of a Savior, is that for Luke the practice is an ongoing thing.

The greeting *chaire/chairete* was used throughout the year, not just for a season, like the greetings “Merry Christmas” and “Happy Holidays” are used for just a short time.

So, we see that Luke wants to co-opt, takeover, that is, Luke wants Romans re-imagine what the everyday “greeting” in his society can mean.

It is not just a “hello” or a “what’s up” or a “howdy.”

No, the greeting is a command to live your entire life in optimistic joy because God has given the world a Savior.

And every time a Christian heard that greeting he or she was to remember that.

PAUSE

Yes, the gospel writer Luke would have us live in optimistic joy.

Luke would have us be eternal optimists.

We know what it is to be an eternal optimist, right?

It is a person who never gives up hope in what they believe.

It is a person who believes that everything will turn out okay in the end.

It is a person who is always positive, always hopeful, always optimistic.

In short, an eternal optimist is a Christian.

This is not to say that Christians believe they won't endure hardships at times.

This is not to say that Christians believe they will never have trials or challenges.

But even in the midst of trials, and challenges, and hardships there is a most certain hope.

Even in the face of adversity and misfortune, Christians are confident, they have reassurance.

Because in the end, love wins.

In the end, God's love for the world as seen in Christ Jesus reigns victorious.

In the end, there is the cross and resurrection.

The apostle Paul, who was the epitome of the eternal optimist, says it this way...

Paul says, "If God is for us, who is against us?"

If God is for us, who can win out against us?

God is on our side because God comes to be among us as one of us.

God is on our side, because God becomes incarnate.

If God is for us, who is against us?

Can evil win out? No.

Can sin win out? No.

Can the devil destroys us? No.

God is for us, and so, we are to always rejoice.

This is why then Luke says the Romans greet one another with "rejoice."

"Rejoice," because God has given us the Savior Jesus Christ.

“Chaire!” “Chairete!”

And this is why we say “MERRY Christmas.”

This is why we say “HAPPY holidays.”

This is why we rejoice not just for a season but for all of our lives.

This is why we can be eternal optimists.

PAUSE

God is for us, who can be against?

Love wins.

God’s love wins.

And so may that same love be in us, that was in Christ Jesus.

Because other people need to know, need to see, what it is to be an eternal optimist.

Other people need to know hope.

Other people need to know God is for them, too.

Thanks be to God. Amen.