

Sermon 12-23-18
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Trinity Lutheran Church
W. Hempstead, NY
Based on the Gospel for the Third Sunday in Advent, Luke 1:39-45

A Spiritual Jump

John the Baptist was a prophet even before he was born. For, he leapt in his mother's womb in response to the voice of Mary, mother of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

As we saw last week, there came a time in John's ministry when dejected and in Herod's prison, he wondered if Jesus was the Messiah. It's not recorded what John's reaction was when the messengers he sent to Jesus returned. But Jesus had given John's messengers words that John would understand. These were words of the prophets who had lived 600 years before.

For mixed into the prophetic books of the Old Testament are words whereby the one true Messiah can be identified by anyone who cares to look, even to this day. For these words predict Messiah would be born in Bethlehem – as we saw in today's first lesson. They predict He would be born of a virgin. They predict the kind of miracles He would perform. They predict He would be put to death by piercing, as indeed He was. They even predict that after three days and three nights He would rise from the dead.

There are approximately 308 prophecies of Messiah recorded in the Old Testament. The chances of any one person in history being able to fulfill just ten of the major prophecies is the same as filling the state of Texas two feet deep with silver dollars, marking one, throwing it into the pile and asking someone to find it on the first try. God made it so that our Messiah, His Son, can be readily identified by any generation that can read the Old Testament prophecies. Jesus is the One.

But, back to Mary. To this day, any Jewish woman who believes that Messiah is coming hopes that her son will be the anointed one. But they will all wait in vain. A young Jewish woman from Nazareth in Galilee named Miriam or Mary in English was the one Yahweh chose to be the mother of Messiah. Her Son, Jesus, is so important that we count the years of this era from the supposed year of Jesus' birth.

Now, way back in the Garden of Eden, Yahweh made a promise to another woman – Eve. It was an indirect promise because it's found in the middle of the judgment Yahweh executed against the serpent. We read that Yahweh said to the serpent in Genesis 3:15, "And I will put enmity [that's war] between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." The word offspring is in the singular. So it means war between one offspring of the serpent and one offspring of the woman. Also, it's clear that the offspring of the woman destined to crush the head of the serpent will be a male. This is because this man will take the place of Adam, the first man, the man Yahweh commanded to protect the human race. But where Adam failed by yielding to temptation, the man prophesied in Genesis 3:15 will not fail. He will crush the head of the serpent once and for all.

So whereas Eve caused the downfall of the whole human race by tempting Adam, Mary blessed the whole human race by bearing the Messiah who would fulfill Genesis 3:15. This is why filled with the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth, Mary's cousin, declared in Luke 1:42-45, "42... 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! 43 But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. 45 Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!'"

This son of Mary's was destined for great things. As we read in Colossians 1:15-18, "15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy."

And most important to each one of us here this morning is what we read in the second lesson. Hebrews 10:10, "... we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

The one thing Adam lost for himself and all his descendants is holiness – the ability to stand in Yahweh's presence as righteous, pure and holy as Yahweh is. Jesus regained it for us.

Now, how is it that we can be as righteous and good as Yahweh? Certainly it will not happen in this life. However, it is the eternal destiny of all who have repented and put their faith in Mary's son.

Again, repentance is giving up all the words in your life that are not God's Word and forsaking the power and way of life that is in those rebellious words. Repentance is then submitting your life to the power of God's creative and living Word.

Repentance is life changing. It's not only a change in your way of thinking, it's a root change in your way of believing – what you believe about life, people, yourself . . . everything. It's a root change that can be effected only by God's holy Word and God's Holy Spirit. Repentance causes something to jump in our spirits just as John the Baptist jumped in his mother's womb at the sound of Mary's voice. And that jump is from eternal death to eternal life.

Over the years I've heard many people describe that jump in their spirits when the Spirit of God came. In many cases they were quite vile people with vile ways of life. But when Lord Holy Spirit came bringing God's preached Word into their hearts things began to change.

When Charles Dickens wrote A Christmas Carol he had this kind of spiritual jump in mind. In that story the cynical old miser, Ebenezer Scrooge, was transformed into a generous person of hope through repentance. Of course, this transformation did not occur by a direct preaching of the God's Word, but Dickens cleverly hid the Word in the story using the spirits of Christmas past, present and future.

So, may Christmas make our spirits jump. Jesus was born precisely for this purpose – that His sacrifice would make us holy once for all eternity. By faith in Him it not only will be so, it is so. Get ready for a new life even in this life. Amen.

All Bible quotes are from the NIV.