

**Those Who Dream – Sow Joy**  
**Luke 1: 39-55; Psalm 126**  
**Don Lincoln**

I recall an old story of a veteran air traffic controller, who received a frantic call on a dark New England night, from a less-experienced pilot flying a single engine Cessna.

“Mayday....mayday. Cessna 93-niner – my engine's quit!”

“I've got you Cessna.....” said the controller.

After several hurried tries of the restarting procedure, to no avail, the pilot asked the controller what to do. He was out in the country and couldn't see any lights, cities, towns – nothing.

The controller radioed back: “Set your optimum glide, calculating your speed and altitude.”

“OK – I've done that. What next?”

“When you get to 500 feet, turn on your landing lights.”

“OK – and then what?”

“If you don't like what you see, turn off the lights.”

I suspect there are days when we have all felt like that. For many of us, this year feels like we've turned on the lights and don't like what we see.

Imagine Mary. Her world has been turned upside down. Imagine her conversation with her parents – “Well, mom and dad, you see, this angel showed up in my room, and explained it to me this way.....”

How many days did she wake up in the morning, thinking, perhaps hoping it would be a dream – and then feeling the kick, or the stirring, or that queasy stomach again, and knowing – “Nope – it's not a dream. This is for real!”

Our text from Luke begins “In those days, Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country.” That's what shows up in Luke's gospel immediately after the angel has told Mary she's going to conceive. But that message is only half the message from the angel. The angel also told Mary that her aged, once barren cousin to the south was herself already six months pregnant. Is it this piece of news that led Mary on this journey?”

Had Mary even told Joseph before she left? Did she escape to her cousin's in the hill country for help navigating her personal upheaval and so she could get used to the idea that this really wasn't a dream?

And yet today's text reminds us – **at its heart** – it really **IS** a dream. A bigger dream. A dream beyond imagining. A dream for the world and everyone in it. And at the very center of the dream is joy.

Joy is woven throughout the text. Elizabeth – in her old age – is overjoyed at Mary's unexpected arrival, and the strong movement of the child in her own body reassures her that even at her age, in her sixth month of pregnancy, all is well.

**HER** long-time dream of bearing a child is not only happening – but she now has a young cousin with whom to share this unique and powerful journey. Elizabeth bursts out in proclamation of the blessedness of what God is doing, and interprets even the child's leap in her womb as an expression of sheer joy!

Mary catches Elizabeth's excitement and begins to sing. Even in the uncertainty that each of them is facing, Elizabeth's joy is contagious. Mary's quiet acceptance (just a few days ago probably) – “Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to Your word,” – has turned into ecstatic song that dreams dreams of great joy. The very same great joy the angels will announce to the shepherds in the coming days – “...good news of great joy to all people!”

Mary's song begins – “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my savior.” **REJOICES!!** “I am filled to overflowing with joy,” Mary sings. Deep joy. Wide joy. Full-throated joy. Joy at what is not yet, but is surely coming by the hand of the Lord. A world rearranged by God's ordering, and **JOY**, because that new order is coming.

You know, it's not uncommon in church to hear complaints during Advent. “Why don't we sing Christmas carols? That's what we did when I was growing up. They're playing in the mall all the time. Besides, where did all these minor key Advent hymns come from?”

I get it. Most pastors I know savor and love preaching about the waiting, the watching, the hoping, the weightiness of Advent as we hope against hope – but I get that weeks of that can become ponderous.

I received an email early in this season which said “Don – I'm hoping it won't be all gloom and doom this Advent. We have a vaccine coming, for heaven's sake!” She didn't actually say for heaven's sake. I added that because it's what her message really implies, because she continued, “I believe God gave strong minds to our scientists and we should be joyful at God's blessings!” **AMEN!**

While reading that email I remembered I had “**Joy Sunday**” in Advent, and I thought – that'll preach! Because for Mary and Elizabeth – who still live in a Roman occupied territory, oppressed by those rulers, with their own worlds turned upside down – we see here with these two women **glimpses of great joy**. And we, like them, can be exuberant even in the midst of the weightiness, because we too see glimpses of joy.

Glimpses of joy, even when there is still much darkness. You and I see them all the time.

In our recent new members' class a few weeks ago, one of the young couples who joined Westminster has never set foot in our building. They started attending during the pandemic, connecting with Westminster online. They found us on live stream. What a joy that is!

I found great joy in the story a few weeks ago when a New York restaurant discovered that two tables, who had each ordered a bottle of wine, got the other table's wine instead. Both wines had been poured into identical decanters, and they got switched when delivered to the tables. The young couple that ordered the \$18 Pinot Noir, instead received a \$2,000 1989 Mouton Rothschild.

Upon discovery, not only did the owner allow the couple to keep the wine they had started, but made sure another bottle of the Rothschild was opened for the four Wall street businessmen who had ordered it. There was joy all around – well maybe not for the owner – but it did make me smile. After all, doing the right thing always brings joy!

And then this video – shared with me a couple weeks ago by Gerry, our church administrator – brought glimpses of joy – of a once prima ballerina now suffering with Alzheimer's, who with headphones on, is brought to life by the music that is still magic deep in the recesses of her mind.....watch: <https://youtu.be/7j-ONKlykx8>

As colleague Steve Garnaas-Holmes writes in our gathering thought:

These are hard days.  
But joy is bigger than these days.  
Joy is not happiness with present circumstances,  
but harmony with the goodness of God  
and the overflowing of God's delight in us.

The greatest Christmas Carol ever sung was composed 2,000 years ago by a pregnant teenage girl who was visiting her cousin Elizabeth. And between the two of them that day – as crazy as those days were – there could not have been more joy found in the world anywhere else.

“My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my savior. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich empty away.”

Even as she sang this not yet fulfilled message, Mary was filled with joy. For she knew the Mighty one was doing – and would continue to do – great things. For her, and through her, for the world.

Thanks be to God! Joy to the world! AMEN.