**“A Room with a View (Love)”**

Sermon by Lisa Crismore

December 19, 2021 – John Knox Presbyterian Church

*Luke 1:39-55 (CEB)*

*Mary got up and hurried to a city in the Judean highlands. She entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. With a loud voice she blurted out, “God has blessed you above all women, and he has blessed the child you carry.” Why do I have this honor, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy. Happy is she who believed that the Lord would fulfill the promises he made to her.”*

 *Mary said,*

*With all my heart I glorify the Lord! In the depths of who I am. I rejoice in God my savior. He*

*has looked with favor on the low status of his servant. Look! From now on, everyone will*

*consider me highly favored because the mighty one has done great things for me.*

 *Holy is his name. He shows mercy to everyone, from one generation to the next, who*

*honors him as God. He has shown strength with his arm. He has scattered those with*

*arrogant thoughts and proud inclinations. He has pulled the powerful down from their*

*thrones and lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich*

*away empty-handed. He has come to the aid of his servant Israel, remembering his mercy,*

*just as he promised to our ancestors, to Abraham and to Abraham’s descendants forever.”*

When I was sixteen, my parents hosted a girl from Ohio, who was my age. Joyce Marchal came to us through a youth 4-H exchange program. We had a connection right away and grew very close. When she returned home that summer, we continued to correspond and called frequently. The spring of 1979 we decided to drive to Ohio and surprise her for her graduation. I remember her face lighting up as we greeted her with “SURPRISE!” There was no doubt that she was thrilled to see us! We also had the opportunity to be invited into her parent’s home with wonderful hospitality and to meet her family.

Today, Mary has gone in a hurry to see her cousin Elizabeth. With no cell phones or landlines and definitely no time for a letter to arrive, Mary arrives with her being the one to greet her hosts. Zachariah and Elizabeth are no doubt surprised but thrilled to see Mary.

This is no ordinary visit! Mary has just found out from the angel, Gabriel, that she is going to have a baby. By the power of the Holy Spirit, this will be God’s Son. One would not question Mary on why she is needing to get away to a safe place – a place of hospitality and community, where she can process this news. She has made the choice to accept the call on her life **to make room to carry and give birth to the Messiah!**

To make room and house this holy child throughout her pregnancy, is a big risk. Yet, Mary accepts without little question or hesitancy. It doesn’t take long for God’s Spirit to affirm Mary because as soon as she enters, Elizabeth’s unborn baby jumps for joy and informs Elizabeth about Mary’s circumstances.

Mary has not uttered a word about her condition. The question that comes to Elizabeth is “Why?” Why do they have the honor of the mother of their Lord greeting them?

It is interesting how Mary answers. The prophet, Mary, sings of what this means and what the fulfillment of God’s promise will mean to the world. By making room for this blessing in her life, God’s servant will be a part of creating goodness for humankind. This is a song of love. It is a song of justice and giving hope for the oppressed. This child will bring mercy, strength to the weak, lift up the lowly and feed the hungry with good things. **The view from where Mary stands as the mother of the Christ child** is pretty sweet, especially for a poor peasant girl from Nazareth.

However, Mary will encounter judgment from her parents and Joseph. She possibly could be stoned from the critical people in her social circles. Some parts of this journey will be a challenge and other parts a true blessing. But she holds onto God’s promise that will be fulfilled by her commitment by making room and what that will mean for others.

I brought my Advent calendar today. It has seen better days but it is truly loved by our family. Jon Berquist challenges us to take everyday leading up to Christmas as a new adventure. Each ornament I pull from the pocket is different just like the day that is gifted to me. Yes, I have seen these ornaments before but I don’t remember from year to year which pocket I put them in when I put it away. When my children were young, we found out real quick that one of them would put the angel on the first day of December and the other would put the manger under the tree on Christmas Eve. I thought that took care of the fighting. As my children became adults, they would tell me that it was a big thing to get the candy cane, heart or poinsettia. They don’t look like much but they are the more unique ornaments just like some of the unique days we encounter. (Worship Design Studio copyright; www.worshipdesignstudio.com/theinn)

I appreciate this being brought to my mind because there are days leading up to Christmas where I just want to check-off all the things on my to-do-list as we race to the finish line and reach Bethlehem. You know, Christmas program – check; Bell Ringer performance – check; Blue Christmas – check; Christmas Cards – check . There are so many details to get done. A few weeks ago, I popped into Patty McKinnon’s Church School class and they were talking about preparing for Christmas and as the class brainstormed we came up with a whole board full of things.

Thank you Jon Berquist for reminding me that Christmas is not a surprise where I close my eyes and open when the day arrives. No, I must open my eyes and take in the view of every day that takes us on our journey. It was no doubt that Mary, our prophet, did this as a new mother to be. God was using Mary’s womb as a place to build or create something extraordinary – A Savior, who would come to save the world. This would not only change Mary’s life forever but the world’s life forever!

As I think about this passage, I wonder what is the Holy Spirit building or creating in me – in you – in the church. Jon Burquist challenges us by asking, “God is building something right here, right now. We don’t know if it will survive, or we don’t know what to do next.” What is going on here at John Knox or in your own life? What is the view from the room that God has prepared? (Worship Design Studio copyright; www.worshipdesignstudio.com/theinn)

I think about this past week as we celebrated Georgia Thomas’ life and resurrection a week ago. Her gathering of family and friends was a testament of community. If you have ever gone to visit Georgia, she was one to invite you in with a gift of hospitality. Her daughter spoke of Georgia speaking up for those who didn’t have a voice. Georgia spoke out against racial injustice. She was active in her younger years helping lead a group that supported young teenage African American girls, giving them self-confidence and teaching them leadership at Emmanuel Presbyterian Church. The people, who participated in her service, shared words of poetry, prayer, remembrances and beautiful music. In fact, the soloist voice brought (goose) God bumps to my arms. Georgia was truly a woman of faith.

On Monday night, the Education Team met for our annual Christmas dinner. We celebrate our year and the work we have done for God. We give thanks for the many hours everyone has spent teaching and reaching out to our community. This next year there will be challenges. Our youth have stopped coming to church and participating. Our Church School numbers for our children is spotty. It is difficult to keep motivating people willing to serve, if week after week no one comes. How do we do things differently? God is present. The Christ Child is coming and we have that story to tell. But, the old way of doing church school doesn’t seem to be working. We also have something called Covid that continues to take on new forms and wreak havoc. So, what do we do?

The Prime Timers went to our annual Ayres Tearoom gathering for Christmas on Wednesday. A change in our normal schedule didn’t hamper eleven folks to come and join in fellowship. Some of the regulars didn’t come because of illness but we had some new faces join us. There were also visits over the last two weeks with some of our Deacons to visit our shut-ins. Most recent were visits to Russel Heath, Irene Hopper and Norma Pratt. These moments of pastoral care and coming together to celebrate community seemed to be valued by our congregation and very important.

Elizabeth remarks that Mary is happy because she believes that the Lord will fulfill his promise to her. What do we think of when we hear the word “fulfill”? If you google it, the internet will tell you that most people think of the fulfillment of an order. Many of us are waiting for the fulfillment of shipping orders for Christmas especially with the shipping crisis going on in the US. What comes to my mind is to fulfill a commitment. We have hired a contractor to convert our screened-in back porch into a four-seasons room. It has been quite the journey but I believe the contractor has finally fulfilled the commitment on the contract. I am sure he is wanting to get paid!

Mary believes that God will fulfill his promise. She has committed her part and given her life so that God’s Son can come into the world and be with us! Thanks be to God for the prophet, Mary, who makes room for Jesus - Emmanuel to be born with us! How will we make room and what will be our view? Amen.