

Pastor T.C. Arnold  
4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Advent  
Luke 1:39-56  
December 24, 2017

In the Old Testament, the presence of God brought both fear and excitement. You might remember God speaking to Adam in the garden after they eat that forbidden fruit. They hid in fear and shame from Him because, as Adam would say, “we are naked.” And then, while it might have been very exciting and comforting to know that God was leading the people by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night through the desert, think how terrifying it must have been when God descended upon Mt. Sinai in a thick cloud with smoke with fire. And then, in the presence of God, Moses on the top of Mt. Sinai was told by God that he was not allowed to look upon the face of God lest he die. God said these comforting words to Moses, *“I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.”* Fear comes with great excitement and comfort.

You see, if we are honest we know that the excitement and anticipation of glorious events will, at times, bear both fear and excitement. For example, in the Gospel text for today, excitement is mingled with holy awe and anticipation. Both are included in the words of Elizabeth and Mary in Luke chapter 1. Why the “holy awe” that includes fear with joyous anticipation? Because both Mary and Elizabeth knew the Old Testament... like the story of Moses. Or, even this story that you might remember in 2 Samuel 6...

In the days of King David, the Ark of the Covenant was being brought into Jerusalem. Thirty thousand men of Israel went out to bring the Ark of the Covenant out of the house of Abinadab into the Holy City. Now Abinadab’s house was on a hill. They had a new cart for the Ark of the Covenant. Two men, Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab were driving the new cart forward. Then, something tragic happened. When the cart entered onto a new floor, the oxen pulling the cart stumbled. Then, Uzzah, with every good intention in mind, touched the Ark of the Covenant to stabilize it. After this the text says, *“And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah and God struck him down there because of his error; and he died there beside the Ark of God.”*

That doesn’t seem fair. He had every good intention in mind. But he still disobeyed the Lord and he touched the Ark when he was commanded not to. We don’t like that rule – not if you have good intentions in mind. Guess what, King David didn’t either. It says in the text that David was angry because the Lord had burst forth against Uzzah. It seems like for good reason. Tragedy hit the house of Abinadab and it’s hard to understand why. From that day on for the next three months, David was afraid of the Lord. The Ark did not go into the Holy City of Jerusalem and instead went into the house of Obed-Edom. David, in terror at the untouchable holiness of God, cried out: *“How shall the Ark of the Lord come to me?”* He was in “awe” over what had happened – both fear and anger. Likewise, Elizabeth, in awe before the mother of her Lord, says, *“why should this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?”* Maybe there was a bit of fear in her words with a thought in her mind... what happens if I touch God?

You see -- the Lord and His presence causes a reaction – and sometimes we aren’t sure how to react. The Lord came before David in the Ark of God. The Lord came before Elizabeth as an unborn child in the womb of Mary. She was the vessel carrying the Lord. Both fear and excitement come. And they both come in their own way – for their own reason – to establish the presence of the Lord in the man Jesus the Savior.

We see how the Old Testament fear and excitement with God’s comfort is pulled together into the New Testament. They all belong together – they are connected. The way the Lord is carried into

our presence – by the Ark – as a child in His mother’s womb – cannot be completely comprehended. Neither can the reaction of Elizabeth or the death of Uzzah. The Lord makes good on His promises and He is brought before His people by humble means – carried by a “new cart” pulled along by oxen – a humble virgin, who would eventually be brought on a donkey to Bethlehem, stands here in the text before her relative, Elizabeth.

As you can tell a lot has happened with the presence of the Lord in times gone by and in times today. A lot has happened and there have been a lot of different reactions. There has been fear, anger, joy and sometimes confusion. It’s not always songs that magnify the Lord. But all of them tie together today to tell a great story – a lasting story of the way our Lord would present Himself to His people. Mary would “magnify” the Lord. She would do it through her special song. As the first Christian, Mary is struck with a desire to sing a hymn of praise because she believes these things will happen despite the lowliness of her condition. These things will happen despite her fears or her excitement.

Parents you know how fear and excitement sometimes comes together as one. When our new little ones are born, God sends forth a true blessing that is both exciting and scary. This new little one, like we have here with Adelais today, has brought so much joy to this family. Yet, at the same time, with a child come new challenges and responsibilities that causes even the most skilled and responsible parent to be anxious and a bit afraid. There is so much going on in these little precious gifts that come from the Lord... our children. They are both a grand blessing that bring excitement over God’s creation as a new member is added to our family. Yet, holy fear and trepidation fills our hearts when we worry about them, or, worry about all the other matters of life that come with adding another member of the family.

In the first part of the Magnificat Mary says, “*My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior...*” Now the second part is sometimes called “the Great Reversal” (Just, pg.84). The reason, because the lowly are made strong and given nourishment, He scatters the proud, He feeds the hungry and the wealthy are left with empty hands. What Mary refers to in the second part of the Magnificat is mercy. It’s the same kind of mercy that Isaiah referred to last week and that we hear from John the Baptizer. It refers to a God – our Savior – who will make the mountains low and the valleys raised up – out of mercy for us. Mary sees God in action for those who need God.

Today, this is how God keeps and preserves His precious ones. It’s done through the simplest means like His Word. His Word of law should terrify us. It convicts us of our sins. And you are a sinner who needs to heed the word of God. That word should terrify us and bring to the presence of God’s mercy in joy and comfort. Today, God shows you how He makes Himself known. He did so through simple means like water and the Word for Adelais we saw baptized today.

Today, God reveals His face to us, He shows us who He is in a child born in a manger, who lived to die for you. We see His face in the Word of God. We know what He would have those who believe on Him. Today transcends the fears we have in a mixed up world we live in. He shows us all we need and gives us everything... God made flesh to live and then die for our eternal life.

Holy awe is before us today. God has chosen how to come to His people. God has chosen how to reveal Himself. This should cause holy fear in our hearts... to never look anywhere else but to Him. Without Him is death. But thanks be to God, we are not without our Lord. He comes and promises to come again. “Oh Come, Oh Come, Immanuel...” With excitement, joy, and great comfort you bring to God’s people on this most holy day. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.