

Worship Service from First Presbyterian Church of Magnolia

Sunday, December 13, 2015

The liturgist and pastor will meet in the hall outside the choir room a couple of minutes prior to the start of the service at 10:45am. The liturgist will enter followed by the pastor. The pastor will step into the pulpit, welcome everyone, and make announcements....

The preacher will then ask...

“Are there any other announcements or concerns of the church that need to be made known at this time?..... Thank you.”

The preacher will take a seat.

PRELUDE

"O Come, All Ye Faithful"

The Handbell Choir

After the Prelude, the liturgist should step to the lectern and say,

“Would you join me in reading the responsive call to worship adapted from “The Magnificat” in Luke 1 and printed in our bulletins?”

CALL TO WORSHIP

(adapted from Luke 1:46-55)

My soul magnifies the Lord, & my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

For he has regarded the low estate of his servant & henceforth all generations will call me blessed.

He who is mighty has done great things for me, & holy is his name.

His mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation.

He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts and put down the mighty from their thrones,

He has exalted those of low degree and filled the hungry with good things,

He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,

And kept His promise to our fathers, to Abraham and to his posterity for ever.

Let us worship God, beginning with a short video explaining the meaning of the third Advent candle, “Joy”.

ADVENT CANDLE LIGHTING

“Joy”

A Video

After the video, the liturgist will return to the lectern and say...

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

Let us pray... Our Father, like Mary, we cannot understand the experiences by which you lead us, the ways in which you come to us. But we know that you come to this world in love, to bless our lives with your presence. Come now to us through your Word and Spirit, that we may ever trust in what you are doing, and rejoice as we anticipate what is yet to be. Strengthen us, that these good tidings of great joy for all people may be spread far and wide, and that the meaning of Christ’s birth will dawn on every heart and every nation. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Would all of you who are able please stand with me and join in singing our opening hymn, “Angels We Have Heard on High”, number 23 in our *Hymnals*.

The liturgist should step back from the microphone for the hymn.

*HYMN OF PRAISE

“Angels We Have Heard on High”

The Hymnal #23

After the hymn, the preacher will step into the pulpit and say...

*CALL TO CONFESSION

We dread the acknowledgement of our wrongs. To confess our sins is to admit that we are less than perfect and subject to judgment of One who kept the requirements of the law perfectly. But God’s own Word tells us that Jesus came, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. In penitence and faith, let us confess our sins before God and one another using the prayer of confession as it is printed in our bulletins, pausing at its conclusion for a moment of silent prayer. Let us pray...

*PRAYER OF CONFESSION

We confess O God, that when you come upon us in unexpected ways, we want explanations. When we cannot control what happens, we get angry. We tend to discount that which we cannot understand, for we live too much by reason. Rather than finding delight in the the wonder of your ways, we look for other more explainable causes. Rather than surrendering in humble trust, we respond with

resistance. Our patience and our memories are too short for our own good and we lose sight of the fact that you have always kept your promises. Forgive us and have mercy upon us, we pray. Amen.

*SILENT CONFESSION (*Pause for about 30 seconds of silence.*)

*THE ASSURANCE OF PARDON

The Holy God shows mercy on all who humble themselves and repent of their sin, bringing us out of darkness into the glorious light of forgiveness. Let us rejoice in God's gracious favor... Friends, believe the Good News!

In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven! Thanks be to God!

The preacher will motion for the congregation to stand.

*GLORIA PATRI

The Hymnal #579

Glory be to the Father, & to the Son, & to the Holy Ghost;

As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, World without end. Amen, Amen.

*PASSING OF THE PEACE

Having been reconciled to God through the grace of His Son, let us also be reconciled to one another and share Christ's peace. The peace of Christ be with you.

And also with you.

Share the peace of Christ with others as you will.

After a few moments, liturgist will step into the lectern and say...

"At this time I want to invite all of our younger friends to come forward for a Word from the Lord brought to them by Ms. Karen."

The liturgist will take a seat.

CHILDREN'S SERMON

(All Singing)

***Jesus friend so kind and gentle, little ones we bring to thee;
Grant to them thy dearest blessing. Let thine arms around them be;
Now enfold them in thy goodness, from all danger keep them free.***

As the children leave, the liturgist will step to the lectern and say,

"Let of of us who are able, stand and join in singing our next hymn, "Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming", number 48 in the *Hymnal*.

*HYMN OF PREPARATION

"Lo, How a Rose E're Blooming"

The Hymnal #48

After the hymn, the liturgist will return to the lectern and say...

THE INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

Be Seated. . . . What we celebrate this season is the greatest offering of all time, the gift of Jesus to a world desperate for the peace, joy, hope, and redemption that He brought. May we give as generously as we have received so that all the world may know and receive the blessings of God's grace that are so much a part of our lives. Let us continue our worship with the presentation of our tithes and offerings....

The liturgist will sit down until the Doxology begins to play.

THE OFFERTORY

"Polish Carol" - Sondra K. Tucker

Dr. Elizabeth Davis

*DOXOLOGY (In Unison)

The Hymnal #592

***Praise God from whom all blessings flow; Praise Him all creatures here below;
Praise Him above ye heavenly hosts; Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.***

After the Doxology, the liturgist will return to the lectern and say...

*OFFERTORY PRAYER

Let us pray... Our Father, you gave all that you had, in giving Jesus to the earth, bringing your love to this world that the weak might be made strong to overcome its temptations and pressures, its pain and its suffering, and to lift up a song in grateful praise to you, our Creator and Redeemer. Accept these gifts as our thanksgiving, and an expression of our concern for those in need. Follow these offerings with your blessing that the poor, the hungry, and the oppressed may be filled. Amen.

THE AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

"The Apostle's Creed"

Let us remain standing and reaffirm our Christian faith using the traditional words of the Apostles' Creed printed in our bulletins. Let us say what we believe...

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen.

Invite the congregation to... "Be seated," and take a seat.

SPECIAL MUSIC

"Gesù Bambino" - Pietro Yon

Joanna Smith, soprano

After the Special Music, the Liturgist will return to the lectern & say...

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Our first lesson for this morning is taken from the fifth chapter of the Prophet Micah beginning at the 2nd verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #805 in your pew bibles. Listen now for the word of God...

"But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has brought forth; then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel. And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth; and he shall be the one of peace."

The liturgist will take his/her seat.

The preacher will then return to the pulpit and say...

Our second reading this morning is taken from the gospel of Luke, the first chapter, beginning with the twenty-sixth verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #883 in your pew bibles. Listen now for the word of God...

"In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her."

Leader: ...This is the Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

THE SERMON

"Nothing Is Impossible with God"

"For nothing will be impossible with God." It's just one of those great truths that's true regardless of the context. You don't have to know who said it to whom or where. You can put it in a bottle and toss it in the sea and have it wash up on a distant shore, and it's true. You can put it on a banner and have an airplane carry it across the sky, and it's true. You can write it on a slip of paper and put it under your pillow; it's true.

Do you remember those children's fairy tales you read to your children when they were little-- the ones where elves come in the night to fix things that are broken, or the one where a beautiful maiden spins straw into gold, or a kiss from Mr. Right can bring the princess back to life, and where everyone except the wicked live happily ever after. touches things with her wand and all hurts are healed, and dirt turns to gold. All wishes come true, and animals talk to children, and nothing is impossible with God. It sounds like a fairy tale, but **IT** isn't. It's from Holy Scripture. And it has been the anchor, the rock, the sustenance for people in impossibly difficult circumstances from the beginning of time. I heard this text once spoken through the bars of a jail to a prisoner who sat in there with his head in his hands crying, wondering what would happen to his wife and child. Nothing is impossible with God. You can write it with Crayola in every orphanage; you can embroider it on a pillow in every nursing home.

It is the truth. Nothing is impossible with God.

I remember the first time I heard it, it was in Upshur County, Texas where my daddy's people come from. While we were visiting my grandmother one weekend, we got a call the a distant cousin named Norwood had dropped his cigarette while driving, leaned over to pick it up, and hit a tree, breaking his neck. He had a wife and three or four kids who depended on him, and now he was likely to die or be paralyzed for the rest of his life. My grandmother and my mom went into the kitchen, sat at the table and prayed for him. I just listened from the doorway. And that's when I heard my grandmother say, "Lord it don't matter one bit what the doctors say, 'cause with you, all things are possible, and we're asking you to heal him. Let him walk again and support his family. You can do it Lord, if you will. Amen."

And God healed. And Norwood walked. And I learned, "**NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE WITH GOD.**"

I don't know if you people know it, I don't know if I've told you, but I had to remind myself of that a lot when I came here. Good preachers going back to Paul, always want to be all things to all people. But look at us here, We've got some rich, and we've got some poor. We got yellow dog democrats and dyed in the wool republicans. We've got folks who were dunked when they were baptized and a bunch that just barely got their scalps damp. There are folks who were raised Baptist, and Lutheran, and Episcopalian, Assembly of God, Catholic, proud Presbyterians and those who are fiercely non denominational. We've got a whole bunch of Razorbacks, but a smattering of cowboys, & aggies, lions, tigers, and bears. And with God, all these people of with all these backgrounds can come together in one faith in God as revealed in Jesus Christ. And even though we occasionally test that proposition, we know.... We KNOW!.... that God has made us, even us... ONE church... and all things really are possible.

The Bible is full of stories of our God who makes the impossible possible....

Someone once told a story of an encounter between Richard Dawkins, the famous atheist, and a young boy who was quietly reading the story of Moses leading his people through the Red Sea to safety ahead of Pharaoh's army. When Dawkins saw what he was reading, he could not resist the opportunity to enlighten one so young, so he sat down next to the boy and began to try to open his eyes to the "realities" of the miracles of the Bible. "That can all be very easily explained. Modern scholars have shown that the Red Sea in that area was only 10 inches deep at that time. It was no problem for the Israelites to wade across.

The boy was stumped. His eyes wandered from the man back to the Bible laying open in his lap. The man, content that he had enlightened a poor, naive young person to the finer points of scientific insight, turned to go. He had taken only two steps when the boy shouted, "Hallelujah, Praise God!"

Dawkins turned to ask the reason for his sudden elation.

"Wow!" exclaimed the boy happily, "God is greater than I thought! Not only did He lead the whole nation of Israel through the Red Sea, He topped it off by drowning the whole Egyptian army in 10 inches of water!"

With God, Nothing is Impossible! Do you remember other examples of this truth?

God visited Abraham with the promise of a son. Abraham was confused at such a possibility. After all, he was nearly a hundred and Sarah was ninety-- simply too old to bear a son-- She even laughed at them when she heard their words. But nine months later, Sarah gave birth to a Son, Isaac-- through whom the nation of Israel was given birth.

Centuries later, we have the story of Hannah - a woman much like Sarah - beyond childbearing years and childless. Much distressed about her lot in life, Hannah poured out her heart to God that she might become pregnant and bear a son. Her hope for a future generation was just about shattered. Nine months later, Hannah gave birth to her son, Samuel - who went on to become one of the greatest prophets of Old Testament history.

Then when the King of Israel had turned away from God, and the Philistines were on the brink of defeating the armies of Israel, God anointed a kid from Bethlehem, too small and too young to enlist in the army, and sent him to kill the enemy's greatest warrior and deliver his people. One day little David is just a young shepherd boy, sitting down by the creek, watching the sheep and singing songs to his wooly friends, and the next he is Israel's greatest king - a person after God's own heart.

And now, with the "YES" of Mary, the Almighty God, the Creator of the universe, the very one who hung the stars in the heavens and set the planets spinning, chose to come among us in one so small and vulnerable as a baby lying in a manger.

And all of this because, "nothing will be impossible with God!"

The astounding miracle of Christmas is that God chooses a mere human vessel to give birth to an incredible reality. God is still in the business of picking ordinary people, living ordinary lives, in ordinary places to do extraordinary things in our world. This same God who impregnated Mary with the sperm of new life wants to do the same in our world through us. Today our denomination is in crisis with leaders who have abandoned God's word seeking the favor and approval of men. Schism is threatened everywhere with rancor and division and the potential of our finally finding a way to divide the body of Christ. And when it seems that we just can't go on the way we are being the church in the midst of heresy and the abuse of power, God sends this little text to remind us that with God, nothing is impossible. God is still lifting up ordinary people to ask the hard questions, to challenge the too easy answers, to call those in power to account for their stewardship of God's holy church, his bride.

And when we look at the size of our church, and the small number of young people, and we wonder, what kind of future do we have, God is still here, and this text is still here-- WITH GOD, NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE!

The 14th century German mystic, Meister Eckhart, once said, "Of what use is it, if Mary gave birth to the Son of God fourteen hundred years ago if I am not also giving birth to God in my time, in my place. We are all Mothers of God, for God is always needing to be born."

I think that's the real message of this text for us. The Messiah is asking for space in the lives of each one of us today just so he can show us, **and the world**, what he can do. **Nothing is impossible with God!**

We are God's favored ones today. God is still choosing to be born in us in order that God might reach out to the world through us to accomplish God's purposes.... giving birth to compassion and love, to peace and justice....choosing us to be holy vessels of healing and wholeness, salvation and hope.

Throughout all time, this has always been God's way. God is always doing the impossible through the lives of ordinary people like you and me.

So do not despair if you feel you are too old, or too young. In God's hands, nothing will be impossible. Do not despair if you think you are weak and inadequate. In God's hands, nothing will be impossible.

Do not despair if you think you are not rich enough or famous enough. In God's hands, nothing will be impossible. Do not despair about anything. Dare to risk the impossible. Step outside the predictable, controlled limits of your faith...and say 'YES' to God. Trust God to do the impossible -

whether that be in your personal life, in the life of our congregation, or in the world around us. With God, **NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE!**

THE PASTORAL PRAYER & THE LORD'S PRAYER

Omnipotent and infinite God, thank you for making a way through troubles for us in spite of our lack of faith and faithfulness. You have never forgotten us or abandoned us even when we forgot our promises and abandoned our commitments to you, to your church, and to each other. You have been merciful to us, and have satisfied our hungering hearts. Even today, you lift up common, ordinary men and women to call your church back to faithfulness, and by your grace they remain faithful even when their message is rejected and they themselves are persecuted.

Make us willing and able to be used by you, however you need us. If we must lead, help us to be leaders worthy of your name. And if we are called to follow, let us follow unquestioningly wherever you choose to lead us, remaining faithful to Christ regardless of the challenge. Help us to rely upon your promises. Help us to put our trust in you, that we as children of faith, may show forth the confidence of Mary, the hope of delights anticipated but as yet unseen. May we remember always that your power behind us is always greater than the task ahead of us.

When life assails us with the unexpected or brings worry and alarm, enable us to turn its upset into consolation, its anxiety into significant relief. Keep us ever faithful and ever looking forward to the day of your return and our deliverance, through Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray saying...

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Let all of us who are able stand and join in one voice to sing our hymn of dedication, "Mary Gladly Told Her Cousin", sung to the tune of "Once in Royal David's City", and printed in our bulletins.

*HYMN OF DEDICATION

"Mary Gladly Told Her Cousin"

(Sung to the tune of "Once in Royal David's City")

Mary gladly told her cousin, "Praise the Lord! My spirit sings!"
Young and humble, she'd been chosen! God was surely changing things!
God of love, her words ring true as we sing her prayer to you.

"Now my soul is gladly singing at the greatness of the Lord.
I rejoice, for God is bringing his salvation to the world.
All who live will say I'm blest Even in my lowliness.

"God is mighty, just and holy, and he's done great things for me.
Those who fear him know the mercy that God gives us endlessly.
Mighty ones are brought down low; Lowly ones find blessings flow.

"God has filled the poor & hungry, and he's sent the rich away.
God is active here in history, in a real and wondrous way.
God has promised, and I'm blessed, for I know God's faithfulness."

*THE BENEDICTION

*CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE

"Good Christian Friends, Rejoice!"

Good Christian friends, rejoice, with heart & soul & voice;
Now ye hear of endless bliss: Joy! Joy! Jesus Christ was born for this!
He has opened the heavenly door, And we are blest forevermore.
Christ was born for this! Christ was born for this!

*POSTLUDE

Dr. Elizabeth Davis