

Advent 4

December 19 & 20, 2021

On December 10-11, 2021, a deadly late-season tornado, the largest and deadliest on record in December, produced catastrophic damage across portions of the Southern U.S. and the Ohio valley. The outbreak began in Arkansas before progressing into Missouri, Illinois, Tennessee, and Kentucky. We've all seen the pictures. Within minutes, homes were destroyed, loved ones lost their lives, places of employment were destroyed. For many, their lives will never be the same.

Think of the changed that came into Mary's life. She was a young woman about to get married to a carpenter named Joseph. Suddenly an angel appeared to her and said: **"Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."** Those words radically changed her life and ours as well. She suddenly found herself in the front row of God's plan that had been rolling out for thousands of years. Think of how incredible the message of the angel was to Mary. **"You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High."** Anytime a mother conceives and gives birth to a child it is something special. This child was not any ordinary child. This was God coming to live among his people.

How did Mary react to this angel's message? She goes to visit her cousin Elizabeth and share the good news with her. However, Elizabeth her own life-changing news. Even though Elizabeth and her husband, Zechariah, were well past childbearing years, or as Luke writes: **"they were both very old."** Not only were they going to have a child, but this child would also be someone special. John's job would be **"to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."**

Why would the Almighty God choose these two ladies to be part of his plan? Who were they? In many ways, they were nobodies. If you lived in Israel at this time, they were both just another face in the crowd. God now stepped into their humble lives and lifted the humble up. God has a way of doing that in people's lives. He's done the same for you and me. We might not become the mother or father of Jesus, as Mary and Joseph. God does, however, take us who are humble and sinful people and lifts us up to himself. He lifts us up to carry out his plans and his will in the lives of people.

Why? Why would God do that? God is a God of nobodies. He didn't choose Mary because of who she was. He chose her because of who he is. There was nothing that Mary, or Joseph, or Zachariah, or Elizabeth, or John the Baptist could do to cause God to bring them into his plans. It was all God. He had prepared the world for His Son, Jesus, to enter this world. Or as the Apostle Paul would later write: **"But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship."**

The Jewish people were a broken people. They were under the control of Rome and didn't like it at all. They wanted to bring down the Roman empire, but God had bigger plan. This Messiah, this Jesus, would bring down the kingdom of Satan. As Malachi said in our first reading this morning: **"And he will be our Peace."** Not only does Jesus bring peace for all the people out there in the world, he brings it to you and me. That little baby, whose birth we will celebrate later this week will accomplish all of this.

What can we do to prepare for his birth? We can do the same as Mary. We can stand there and marvel at all that God has done, doing or will do for us. There was nothing remarkable about Mary, but what is remarkable is her response about all the remarkable things that God has done for her. All she could do was to break out in song.

⁴⁸ **"My soul glorifies the Lord**
⁴⁷ **and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,**
⁴⁸ **for he has been mindful**
of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call me blessed,
⁴⁹ **for the Mighty One has done great things for me—**
holy is his name.
⁵⁰ **His mercy extends to those who fear him,**
from generation to generation.

⁵¹ He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
⁵² He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.
⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.
⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful
⁵⁵ to Abraham and his descendants forever,
just as he promised our ancestors.”

He has used his power to do **“mighty deeds.”** He has **“brought down rulers from their thrones.”** He lifts the humble. He gives blessing after blessing to us. He is **“merciful,”** a word that means *“loyal or faithful love.”* God will keep his promises. You know that nothing can separate you from his love. That baby, in the womb of Mary, is the evidence of the Lord’s mercy, loyalty and faithfulness. It is the greatest gift that God could give this world and to each of us. That Jesus will completely crush the head of the serpent.

In Jesus, we have EVERYTHING that we need. There are storms that can be so strong that nothing can stand in its ways. For some, who survived the tornados south of us, they will re-build. Out of tragedy God will bring blessing. The greatest blessing that God has brought this world is his Son, Jesus. Jesus has come into this world to wipe clean our hearts. Instead of destroying us, he has rebuilt our hearts on the cornerstone of Jesus. May we continue to prepare our hearts for Him. Amen.