



Sunday 7th December Psalm 122. Luke 1:25-56

Wednesday 31st 10.00am Bible Study

Sunday 14th December 10.30am Ps.123. Luke 2:1-21 (followed by Christmas lunch)

(Carol Service Sunday 21st December 10.30am)

Prayer for Ukraine: Heavenly Father, destroy the works of the enemies, divide their tongues, frustrate their efforts, and bring their counsels to naught; cause the enemy to fight within their own ranks, weaken their cause, force them to abandon the war and return home in shame, never to return! But may all who seek You rejoice and be glad in You—may those who love Your salvation always say, “*Let God be exalted!*” In Jesus’ Name, Amen!

Remember. *Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always. Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced.* Ps.105:4-5

Thought for the Month: To the eye of faith, God’s Word is sure and by it we perceive that our works are prospered, even when everything seems to go against us. But it is not outward prosperity that Christians most desire and value—it is soul prosperity they long for. *C.H.Spurgeon*

My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour. ^{Lk.1:46-47}

Last week, we focused on being glad to come to God’s House^{Ps.122:1} and when I read out the verse, I said “*sad*” instead of “*glad*”! Of course I quickly corrected myself, but for some people, meeting together as Church is the last thing they want to do—they really are sad to come to God’s House! When they are encouraged to go to Church, there is no sense of joy that they will be in God’s presence, with God’s people and praising Jesus. They have no concept that they could be a blessing to someone and so they reluctantly go to Church to perform a religious duty—and if they can avoid it, so much the better! But for the born-again Believer, meeting together is a wonderful opportunity to express how they feel about God their Saviour and is a time where they can give and receive, where they can be a blessing and be a blessing because they know that they are the House of God and are offering spiritual sacrifices that God accepts: *As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.* ^{1Pet.2:4-5} When Mary met Elizabeth, their babies within them (who were both filled with the Holy Spirit^{Lk.1:15;35}), leapt for joy: *When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favoured, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!”* ^{Lk.1:41-45}

⁴⁵ *The My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour.* ^{Lk.1:46-47}

you who are highly favoured you have found favour with God conversion, the Holy Spirit comes to us, overshadows us and resides within us—a *The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.* ^{Lk.1:35} Luke traces Jesus’ genealogy through Mary, right back to Adam, who he calls the son of God: *the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.* ^{Lk.3:38} This is because God not only created Adam but He breathed His life into him: *Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.* ^{Gen.1:7} When Adam sinned, his relationship with God was broken and this estranged relationship with God was passed on to all of Adam’s descendants—but that family relationship with God is restored when God breathes His Spirit into us again. Luke makes it clear that Joseph was only Jesus’ adopted father because Jesus’ His true Father was God Himself: *Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph, the son of Heli.* ^{Lk.1:23} *So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.* ^{Lk.1:35} And as the Son of God, Jesus was able to breathe the Holy Spirit into His Disciples. *Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.* ^{Jn.20:21-22} When Jesus ascended to

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heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit to continue His work: *And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever— the Spirit of truth... But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.*^{Jn.14:16;26} But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: “When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.” (What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.)^{Eph.4:7-10} And although Jesus doesn’t physically breathe His Spirit into us, He still impart His Spirit to us and the Holy Spirit literally enters into us at conversion. When the Holy Spirit comes, He convicts us of the sin of unbelief, convincing us that we are now righteous in God’s sight and assures us that the devil has been judged and now stands condemned: *But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counsellor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth.*^{Jn.16:7-13} By convincing us of the sin of unbelief, the Holy Spirit gives us faith to believe that Jesus is God’s Son: *Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*^{Jn.20:30-31} To believe is to receive Jesus—this means accepting what God has said and done as true and most especially, true for us! This is much more than legal transaction (although that is what it actually is)—this is the miracle of new birth where we become God’s children: *He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.*^{Jn.1:10-13} See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.^{1Jn.3:1-3} This means that all Christians have the Holy Spirit within them: *Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus be cursed,” and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.*^{1Cor.12:3} If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.^{Jn.14:15-17} In fact we can’t understand spiritual matters without the Holy Spirit: *What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words. The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit. The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things, but such a person is not subject to merely human judgments, for, “Who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.*^{1Cor.2:12-16} And with the Holy Spirit residing within us, we naturally have the supernatural character of the Holy Spirit (also called “the fruit of the Spirit”): *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.*^{Gal.5:22-25} This “fruit” is the atmosphere of heaven and we need to let that heavenly atmosphere permeate our mind as well as our spirit: *Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory... put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator... Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe*

yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience... Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. ^{Col.3:1-17}

Mary's example of rejoicing in God is the standard for all Believers, not just for those who have a bubbly personality: *My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me and holy is his name.* ^{Lk.1:46-49} Rejoicing is also a command from God: *But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who love your salvation say continually, "Great is the LORD!"* ^{Ps.40:16} *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.* ^{Phil.4:4-5} And regardless of our circumstances or feelings, we are to remember what God has done for us and praise Him: *Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.* ^{Ps.103:1-5} The angel told Mary that God's Word has intrinsic power and life: *For no word from God will ever fail.* ^{Lk.1:37} A literal rendering of the text is: *no word from God is void of power.* And Mary's response was: *I am the Lord's servant, may your word to me be fulfilled.* ^{Lk.1:38} And God's Word accomplishes what He wants: *As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.* ^{Is.55:9-12} But even though God's Word will accomplish what He wants, we still need to obey God's Word and put it into practice: *Jesus replied, "My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice."* ^{Lk.8:21} He replied, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it." ^{Lk.11:28}

God's Word is spiritual, living and life giving: *The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them." [The Spirit can make life. Sheer muscle and willpower don't make anything happen. Every word I've spoken to you is a Spirit-word, and so it is life-making. But some of you are resisting, refusing to have any part in this.] (Jesus knew from the start that some weren't going to risk themselves with him. He knew also who would betray him.) He went on to say, "This is why I told you earlier that no one is capable of coming to me on his own. You get to me only as a gift from the Father."* ^{Jn.6:63-65} That is why we put so much emphasis on God's Word—we read it together publicly, we hide it in our heart, we ponder it, we share it, we sing it and we pray it! *For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.*

[God means what he says. What he says goes. His powerful Word is sharp as a surgeon's scalpel, cutting through everything, whether doubt or defence, laying us open to listen and obey. Nothing and no one is impervious to God's Word. We can't get away from it—no matter what.] ^{Heb.4:12-13}

As we approach this festive season, let's keep focused on the true meaning of Advent, which is Emmanuel—God is with us. As we celebrate the birth of our Lord, we should also remembering that there is another Advent coming soon because Jesus will come again. But until He does return, let's follow Mary's example by doing what she did: *My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour.* ^{Lk.1:46-47}

Questions

Why was Mary highly favoured and blessed among women? (Lk.1:28)

What does it mean to “*rejoice in God my Saviour*”?

How does God impart His life to us?

What was the significance of Jesus breathing on His Disciples? (Jn.20:21-22)

What is the main ministry of the Holy Spirit?

Why is God’s Word described as “*alive and active*”? (Heb.4:12)

Puritan Prayer. The Prayer of Love: Gracious Lord, Your Name is love—and in love You receive my prayer. My sins are more than the wide sea’s sand—but where sin abounds, there is grace more abundant. You look to the cross of Your beloved Son and You view the preciousness of His atoning blood. You listen to His never-failing intercession and You whisper to my thought, ‘*Your sins are forgiven, be of good cheer, lie down in peace.*’ Your grace flows for ever as it cataracts from heaven, and Your mercy never wearies in bestowing benefits. Grant me more and more, to prize the privilege of prayer—of coming to You in simple faith as Your child and conversing with You.

Psalms 121: I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip—he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD watches over you—the LORD is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD will keep you from all harm—he will watch over your life; the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.