

**Walk With a Heart of Joy
December 16, 2007
Luke 1: 46b-55
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Every now and then, we have all found ourselves doing something where we lose track of the time. 20 minutes turns into 2 hours, something that started off as a task becomes a labor of love. For whatever reason, we find ourselves so immersed in the situation, or the topic, we don't want to stop. Even when we do, we walk away perhaps saying to ourselves: "I've got to do that again, or, I can't wait to get back there." We are so excited that we tell others with such passion and conviction, that we hope they will want to have the same experience. For many people, this time of year is one of those times. It certainly is for me as I have shared before.

We don't want to stop! We cannot stop because of the joy that we feel in what God has done for us. That is how it was for Mary. Do you remember what happened immediately before the passage we read responsively in Luke? She is visited by the Angel who tells her that she is the one who will carry and give birth to the Messiah, the chosen one of God. So what does she do? She goes to visit her cousin Elizabeth for three months of course! Isn't that what everyone does?

Meanwhile, when Elizabeth tells Mary how her own Baby, who would be John the Baptist, reacted to Mary's presence, her response to all of this information is this hymn, or as we call it the Magnificat of Mary. Now Biblical scholarship and research will tell us that this Magnificat matches very closely Hannah's song over Samuel's birth in 1st Samuel chapter 2. It will also show us that it resembles the Psalms that celebrate God and God's victories. One could say two things to this passage which are true: first, begging the question, did Mary say this word for word? probably not. Second: what is clear here is that having had confirmed for her what was told by the Angel, she could not help but praise God. Likewise Luke as he retold this account when he came to this point could not stop. He could not stop echoing the promise of God that is being fulfilled once again, in the coming of Christ. How can we not sing the praise of God as had been

done in the days of old! The joy that we walk in could not be contained, and must be reflected somehow in this story of Jesus birth. We cannot stop.

For me it is a disappointment if I don't see "It's A Wonderful Life" at this time of year. In it, is not just the story that centers around Christmas, it is the story of George Bailey's life, but it is also the story of our lives. How many times do we fail to see the presence of God? How many times do we fail to recognize the wonderful gift of life that God has given us? How many times do we fail to embrace the joy in the everyday? How many times do we fail to see the joy and hope we bring to others?

It is at this low point when God intervenes, in the form of bumbling Clarence, Angel second class, trying to get his wings, who shows George that God is with him, and that through him, lives are changed. Finally when he realizes this he cannot help but contain the joy he feels. Let's watch and see.

(Movie clip where George wants to live again and runs through the town screaming Merry Christmas).

R. Allen Culpepper describes the Joy theme that recurs throughout Luke. "The joy of the annunciations and the births in the first two chapters recurs in the joy of forgiveness, healings, raising the dead, receiving the outcasts throughout the ministry of Jesus. Appropriately, at the end of the Gospel, the disciples return to Jerusalem with joy and are in the Temple praising God. God's redemptive work brings joy to expression in human experience, and that Joy is most fully expressed in praise of God."¹ So Mary goes on and cannot stop saying: "For he looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant, surely from now on generations shall call me blessed. He has filled the hungry with Good things... He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors." (NRSV)

¹ Culpepper, R. Allen. The New Interpreters Bible, Vol. IX Luke John.

Why did you come to church today? Was it to escape the rigors of the Christmas shopping season? Is it because you felt obligated? Was it because you came seeking once again, wondering, maybe there is something to this Jesus story after all. What no one can deny is that this is a season of giving, a season of Hope, where we walk in Joy for being with family and friends. But above all this season of Advent is about what God has promised us and is coming. In hearing that promise how can we not contain the joy and sing the praise of our God as we wait for the coming of the babe who would be laid in the manger. We cannot stop walking with a heart of Joy that is given to us in Jesus Christ.