

Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

December 22, 2024

Old Testament Reading; Micah 5: 2-5a

Responsive Reading: Luke 1: 68-79

Epistle Reading; Hebrews 10: 5-10

Gospel Reading: Luke 1: 39-45

### **Sermon: It Is What It Is**

By Rev. Jim Gardner

Summary: It is what it is because God is who He is.

Lord of Love your goodness is beyond our wildest imaginings. Your love is not confined to the rich and famous, your love reaches everyone everywhere. Micah in our Old Testament lesson says, "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah. Yet out of you shall come forth to Me the one who will be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old. From everlasting." God is who He is because He loves the "little" like Bethlehem and like each one

of us. God loves the “little”. Spoiler alert. Let us be like Bethlehem, little but willing to accept Jesus. Anywho.

As we move to our second reading, we see this theme of “little” continue. Mary, a young teenager, 14 to 15 at most is told by the angel Gabriel that she will become pregnant by the “Holy Ghost coming upon her.” This announcement comes with a lot of scary baggage. No one would believe that she was a pregnant virgin. I mean, that just does not happen in the real world. As a matter of fact, it could get her stoned to death. Mary is no fool. She runs away from the scrutiny of her neighbors and to the “safe house” of her cousin Elizabeth. Elizabeth is six months pregnant with the baby who will become John the Baptist. After Elizabeth acknowledges the Holy condition of Mary, Mary responds with what is now called the Magnificat.

Mary not only accepts her condition that could endanger her life but she actually Praises God for the blessing of choosing her to carry and deliver the Son of God. Mary heard God, Mary did not doubt God, and Mary praised God for putting her in this perilous position.

Notice here, that Mary and Joseph accept God’s plan and good things happen to them but when Zacharias questions God he loses his voice for nine months plus eight days. Who’d a thunk it?

God loves everyone with circumstances we can not understand so we need to try to see God in all things and we too will be blessed like Mary and Joseph, well sorta.

Not only is God's love of the little, raising eyebrows, but God is also going to turn religion upside down. The need for sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin were not wanted by God. Wait a moment. These things were specifically required in the Law of Moses (and were totally useless). By this standard a man could never get out from under his sins because he had to do the same thing over, and over, and over again every year.

God wanted man to have something attainable and perfect.

Attainable and perfect.

Bada, Bada, boom. The lights go down and the curtain rises and there is Jesus. Not only attainable and perfect but also relatable. "Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God." He takes away the first that He may establish the second. By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." Because of Jesus the Law of Directives is replaced by the Law of Love and Grace.

When Mary entered the house of Elizabeth the baby in the womb of Elizabeth "leaped in her womb". The love of God is to

be trusted long before we should trust the wisdom of men. God's love surpasses man's understanding. People today are still doubting the reality of the Virgin birth of Jesus. People still do not believe that "with God all things are possible".

Mary would have been scorned for being pregnant, but God gave an unborn baby the revelation with such intensity that it "leaped in his mother's womb". Mary ran to avoid scorn only to be blessed with her experience with Elizabeth. God is anxious to speak to us, but we must be still and inclined to listen. Even Elijah in a cave on a mountain realized the small soft voice was God and not the racket of the wind, earthquake or fire.

We too must run. Not away from life's problems but to God's Love.

Deuteronomy 30:11-14 says, "For this commandment which I command you today is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off. It is not in heaven that you should say, 'Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' Nor is it beyond the sea that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it."

And what does Jesus say this commandment is?

John 13: 34-35. “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

And back to Deuteronomy 30: 19. “I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore, choose life, that both you and your descendants may live;”

It is what it is because God is Who He is, and God is Love.

Hallelujah and Amen!