

ADVENT REFLECTION 4 - MARSEILLE CHAPLAINCY 2018

Sharing the Joy.

On the 4th Sunday of Advent it is traditional to focus on Mary, the mother of Jesus. So we begin by looking at her response to the Angel's message that she has been chosen to bear God's son Jesus. Her first reaction is that of fear. As it says in Luke 1:29 'she was greatly troubled'. When an Archangel appears unexpectedly and calls you 'highly favoured' you too might well be afraid! But Mary is reassured by the Angel who then goes on to tell her of the very special task that God has chosen for her. You can read the whole conversation in Luke 1: 26-38. Mary humbly accepts her calling and then hurries off to see her cousin Elizabeth who, in her old age, is also miraculously and unexpectedly pregnant with a special baby, John the Baptist. Elizabeth is delighted to see Mary and prophesies blessing over her. And now we see the first bit of joy. Elizabeth says "As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, *the baby leaped for joy*. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfil his promises to her!" (Luke 1:44-45.) Mary herself, now filled with joy, bursts into song, the song we know as The Magnificat.

"My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour....." (Luke 1:46-55.)

What an amazing response given the circumstances, a response that has to come from the heart of God. The out pouring of joy continues when we come to the birth of this special baby. First from the Angel who brings the message of the birth to the shepherds. Again the immediate response of the shepherds to the angelic messenger is one of fear. In fact it says they were terrified. But the Angel says "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people." The news of the Saviour's birth is the very best news ever! Well by the time the sky has been filled with angels praising God the shepherds have caught the joy and hurry off to find this baby and see for themselves! Their joy overflows as they tell everyone they meet about this very special new baby and then they returned "glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told." (Luke 2:20.)

So we see a pattern of fear turning to joy, sheer joy! From Mary's song in the Magnificat. The joy of the angels and their message. The joy of the shepherds as they spread the good news of the baby. The birth of a baby is usually an occasion of great joy and celebration. For Mary the birth of an illegitimate baby might have brought a reaction of shame and fear. BUT the Holy Spirit overshadowing her produces great joy to bubble up in her. Her soul expands with the knowledge of God's mercy and grace. That is the same joy that the disciples experienced on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit overshadowed them and they spilled out into the streets of Jerusalem telling everyone about the wonder of God's love. (Acts 2: 1-13.)

A deep joy bubbling up from within! Have you ever experienced that kind of joy? When did you last experience such joy? I first experienced that joy when I was filled with the Holy Spirit. For days I couldn't stop grinning like the Cheshire cat in Alice in Wonderland and that joy has never left me. We all need that joy because the joy of the Lord is our strength and we are exhorted to rejoice in the Lord always! The joy which is the gift of the Holy Spirit is unrelated to our situation but has the power to sustain us in difficult situations! Lord give me this joy always please. May you know deep joy this Christmas time whatever your circumstances.

This is the last of four reflections for each week of Advent. I pray that they have been a blessing to you. I pray you will have a blessed and joy-filled Christmas. Sue Goodwin.