**Luke 1:39-56 December 18, 2021**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from our Gospel lesson, Luke chapter 1 here re-reading these words. “And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, ‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” This is our text

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

 A recent advertising campaign slogan for the cell phone company “Verizon” states that, “Everyone deserves better.” The point being that if you are using a second rate, lower grade, slower speed cell phone service then you deserve better, and you should upgrade to their first rate, higher grade, faster cell phone service company. I can see what they are going for and what the point is. But let’s break down that statement, “Everyone deserves better.” If it’s true, then no one should have to get less than the best and if everyone gets the best, then how can it possibly be the best? If everyone is already at the highest possible level or quality than how can you be upgraded? Or what is there to look forward to? How can things get better if I already have better? How can I better myself if I deserve the best? Or the age old question that comes up around this time of year, what do I give the person who already has the best of everything? If they deserve better and have better than how can I give them anything that won’t be seen as less? I ask these questions not to make sense of an advertisement campaign, they aren’t usually dissected or thought about for very long after they flash on a screen. They are designed to be memorable, but not necessarily very deep. But I do think it shows a mindset of our world today, and it struck me just how different the mindset of our lessons for this, the Fourth Sunday of Advent are in comparison.

 “Everyone deserves better.” Which, of course, includes me and it includes you. So let’s make it personal. “I deserve better.” And since it’s very difficult to quantify better from the best, we could even say, “I deserve the best.” Compare that to what we just heard read from our Gospel lesson, the words of Elizabeth recorded in Luke chapter 1, when filled with the Holy Sprit she, upon being in the presence of the very best, the Messiah, the Son of God in the womb of the Virgin Mary asks, “Why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” Why is this granted to her? Why…because everyone **deserves** better, or again to make it personal, why is this granted to her? Because She deserves the best. But that’s not how she thinks, instead she asks why she is granted this wonderful opportunity. It is a teaching moment to her own humility in the presence of greater that she doesn’t see herself as one who is deserving of the opportunity to be in His presence. It’s a total shift from the mindset of “Everyone deserves better” and “I deserve the best” instead asking, “Why is this good thing given to me?” Or “Why would I deserve this?”.

 Humility, being low and exalted up. That’s what we find in our readings for today. Mary herself saying in the Magnificat, “My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” Her focus is on the Lord and what God is doing through Her. She magnifies the work of the Lord through her own life and what she will do in bearing the Son of God into this world. She later says, “He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and has exalted the lowly.” The mighty would think that they deserve the best, but they are humbled. The lowly don’t think they deserve any good thing, and they are exalted. This is shown in the fact that Jesus is born in Bethlehem, lowly Bethlehem, the one that Micah reminds us in our Old Testament lesson is “too little to be among the clans of Judah.” And yet from this lowly place comes the ruler of all of Israel. To the lowly comes exaltation, to the proud and mighty comes a revolution, a casting down from their high place of pride.

 At Christmas when we look under the tree, when it comes to the presents we receive even at an early age, why do we think that we will get anything? What is the reason? Why were we taught that we got the things we did on this glorious day of celebration? Were you taught that you earned these gifts and therefore you deserved the very best based on what you did throughout the year? How many songs about Santa talk about how he rewards little girls and boys for doing the things they should and being good and punishes mean children with coal in their stocking on Christmas Day? Woven into Christmas is the concept of deserving the good things that you get based on what you do. But it’s not Scriptural, and it’s not theologically accurate, and it takes away the true reason that gifts are given in the first place. It doesn’t just affect Christmas morning, it seeps into all the areas of our life. We deserve better, better than what we’ve had to put up with, some broken down car, some less than perfect house, eating food that isn’t the best, or having to wait in line with these….other people to get our Christmas shopping done. I deserve the best. Why? Well…because! Because of what I do. Because of what I know. Because of the good things that I accomplish. We ignore the bad and our souls magnify the good that we do in our own lives. They don’t magnify the Lord, they magnify me. My soul magnifies me and rejoices in all that I do so that I deserve the best. The Magnificat is robbed of everything that makes it the wonderful teaching tool of Mary’s humility and faithfulness and instead is a monument and pedestal of our faithlessness. Even at Christmas, if the gift isn’t as good as we wanted, we rebel, we’re angry, I don’t deserve this, I deserve the best. We ask for something specific which is the best and when we don’t get it we rebel, we don’t deserve to be treated this way. So it is in our lives, we lash out in anger when we don’t get what we want, we don’t deserve this, we deserve the best. We are in church, we give to the church, we pray, sometimes, but we’re better than others, everyone who is a Christian deserves better, or since I am a Christian, I deserve the best.

 Where is the humility? Where is the guiding of the Holy Spirit that we find in the words of Elizabeth? The question isn’t why haven’t I gotten the very best which is what I deserve? The question is, why do I get anything at all? Why is this granted to me? Why does God give me anything? Again, return to your childhood, what was the teaching moment on Christmas morning for receiving the gifts that you got? Did you earn them? Or was it a gift in the spirit of the gift of Jesus Christ to Mary and to the world, the baby born in Bethlehem as a gift of salvation to a world of sin? The gifts we give are to remind us of the gift of Christ which was given to a world that in no way deserved him. The gifts that we share with others simply emphasizes that fact, which means that you give whatever you want in the spirit of what God has given you through His Son. It’s not about what you deserve, if God gave you what you deserve for this past year’s worth of actions you’d get a lot worse than a stocking full of coal. We should never pray to get what we deserve, we don’t know what we’re asking! It shows an unbelievable ignorance to go before the Almighty and perfect God as a poor, miserable sinner and demand that He gives you what you deserve. Thinking that you deserve better or the very best based upon what you have done. That’s how you get cast down from your throne, that’s how you get humbled. Instead we come to God in humility, repenting of our wrongs, asking not for what we deserve but only for His mercy. And that’s how we are exalted. You can’t exalt the one who already is at the top, and if we all deserve better, and all are already at the peak, then God can’t exalt us. Instead we take the lowly place, and pray for God’s mercy, and magnify His actions through our souls. We rejoice in the work of God our Savior, not in the work of our own hands. And we are exalted.

 As a child you knew that there would be a gift under the tree for you at your Grandparents house, and on Christmas morning. You didn’t deserve it, but there it was, given out of mercy and love because you were part of the family. We sang the words of O Come, O Come, Emmanuel, and need to be reminded of it’s core message. God is with us. You don’t deserve Him, yet The Word became Flesh and made His dwelling among us. You don’t deserve forgiveness, yet God forgives and forgives and forgives and forgives again in his love and mercy for you. The presents don’t get taken away and thrown into the fire when you rebel, even though it’s what you deserve. You don’t deserve better, but you get it. God is with you. He came and died and rose again to save you. Jesus is the personification of God’s love and mercy for you. He is the present you don’t deserve and yet you receive, every day, every moment, every mistake forgiven, every low point in your life exalted through His love and mercy, giving you hope and comfort in the darkest and lowest moments, because He is with you. God is with you, in the good times and the bad. May that give you peace and comfort as we complete our journey to the stable, to the manger, to the very site where God first dwelled with us in a lowly city of Bethlehem, exalted through the birth of the Savior, as we are exalted by His love and the remembrance of His coming in our own lives.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.