

St. Luke's UMC  
 December 15, 2024  
 Third Sunday of Advent

*On the Way to Bethlehem*  
***Joachim of Nazareth***  
*Luke 1: 26-38*  
*Dramatic Monologue*

*Following Doxology, all lights then go out and then appear on readers for dramatic presentation of Scripture. Lights down. Soft music plays (violin? playing a Jewish tune) as introduction(below) scrolls on screen and actors get into position for opening scene.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Nazareth at the time of Jesus was a tiny village located in the hills of Lower Galilee roughly halfway between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean Sea. Nazareth is not mentioned anywhere in the Old Testament; or in the Jewish writings of the Talmud and Midrash; or by the first century historian, Josephus, even though he names all of the nearly 200 villages of the region. Nazareth seems to be a forgotten place with just a few hundred people in population.

However, the Romans built an impressive metropolis just a few miles away called Sepphoris. This brought work to people in Nazareth, particularly for builders and carpenters.

An apocryphal writing from the second century AD called The Gospel of James, begins in Nazareth with the story of a couple who were exceedingly wealthy and faithful but unable to have a child. One day the husband was turned away from making his offering at the temple because he failed to produce a child to carry on the covenant of Israel. He went to the wilderness to pray and while there an angel appeared to his wife saying she will bear a child who will be known through all the world. The child born to them was named Mary. Her mother's name was Anna, and her father was name was...Joachim which means Yahweh Prepares

*Lights come up on thrust where men sit huddled together singing as if in worship at the Nazareth synagogue. They chant...Once finished they stand and gather things to leave and offer words of "Shalom" to each other. Men shuffle away. Joachim sits lost in thought. Piano begins softly (playing closing song?) as "Mary and child" walk up aisle*

**Elias:** Joachim, is there anything wrong?

**Joachim:** No, nothing.

**Elias:** Huh. That's the most something of a nothing I've ever heard. (pause) Come on. What is it?

**Joachim:** It's Mary.

**Elias:** Mary? Is anything wrong? Has she had her baby yet?

**Joachim:** I don't know. It will have to be soon. She and Joseph went to Bethlehem to be registered in the census. Joseph is a Benjamite, so he had to return to his ancestral home. I don't know when I will see them; If I will see them again. I don't know if I will be able to hold my grandchild.

**Elias:** Joachim, look. I never said anything to you because I didn't need to. It's not my business. You know how people talk. Some folks just need something to gossip about. But Joseph and Mary are married now. And one day they will return and settle down and they will be accepted just fine. You shouldn't worry.

**Joachim:** It's not that, Elias. The baby. Joseph is not the father.

**Elias:** Oooohhh.

**Joachim:** It's not like that.

**Elias:** Joachim, your daughter is pregnant. Joseph is not the father. How can it *not* be like that?

**Joachim:** Look, you don't understand...*(Benjamin starts talking over him)*

**Elias:** Mind you, it makes no difference to me what...

**Joachim:** Would you just listen? Please. I've had no one to talk to except Anna. I could use a friend. Would you just listen to me? *(Benjamin sits and motions as if to say "Of course.")*

Elias, I'm really struggling and I don't know what to do. I love my daughter so much. You know she was a miracle baby? Anna and I couldn't have children. One day I went to the temple in Jerusalem to make my offering at the temple. I thought, "Who knows, if I continue to be generous in my gifts, if I continue to do good things, maybe the Good Lord will hear our prayer." But instead, the priest told me my gift would not be accepted because I had failed to produce a child of the covenant.

Do you know what it's like to have your humiliation put on full display in front of everyone? I could hear their thoughts. "There's a reason they don't have a child. There's a reason God won't bless them. They have sinned, that's why. I wonder what their sin is!" I know we can say that it doesn't matter what people think, but it does, especially if you believe that people matter most. That's why I choose to live here in Nazareth. It's not for everybody. It's too small for most. It's too remote. It's too unimportant. Unless you believe that people matter more than anything else. Having people you know and who know you. People you can depend on, completely. People you know for generations.

You celebrate their babies and their bar mitzvahs. People you worship with and work with and laugh with and cry with. That's what makes a place important. Until one day, you wonder, do they look down on me? Do they judge me?

And that really is nonsense. You know why? Because everyone thinks that. Everyone goes around asking ourselves if others knew everything about me would they still accept me? And we get so consumed with what others think, we don't ask what God thinks.

So when I got back from Jerusalem, I did what I always do when I can't control things, when my thoughts start to make me anxious. I went out to the hills to be alone and listen. That's what I love about Nazareth. It can be so quiet.

~~Now, tomorrow we will hear the hammers of Sepphoris being built on the hill. We will see its shiny buildings going up. It will be the place people will want to go to, to be seen, to be known, so they can walk around wondering what other people think of them. That's why I have to go further into the hills now, to escape it all. So I returned home and did what I always do. I went into the hills to be alone and pray.~~

My wife wouldn't last 2 hours in the wilderness. She needs people to talk to. If they ever invent a device one day where you could talk to people from a distance, maybe then she could last in the wilderness. But not me. Let me have the solitude. Let get away from all the noise.

It's what you see in the wilderness. Like tonight. See the stars. Have you ever just looked up at a starry sky and wondered how far away are they are? How many are there? And then thought like the psalmist, "Who am I, Lord, that you are mindful of me? That you see me!" When I come to the wilderness, I feel seen.

But you also feel things in the wilderness, like when the rain comes at the end of the dry season. You can smell it before it arrives. And the earth anticipates its long awaited coming. You can feel that. You can feel the earth's anticipation, the dry grasses reaching up. The plants lifting their heads. It's like all of creation waits. You can feel it.

But the best part of the wilderness is what you hear. An animal in the distance. Thunder so far away it seems to come from tomorrow. And the wind blowing through the trees. Sometimes, when you listen closely you can hear God speaking through the wind. That day I did. I heard God call my name and say He heard my prayer and that Anna would have a child.

I came home to tell Anna. I went into the house and hesitated. What if I was wrong? What if God doesn't fulfill this promise. Anna would be crushed. Too often I ask what if God doesn't, rather than what if God does? Well, she spoke first. She said she had a dream in which an angel appeared to her and said her prayer had been heard and she would have a child. "Can you believe it?" She asked me. I said, "I do now."

Do you ever notice that God's messages tend to echo?

That's how we came to have Mary. She was our miracle child. We were faithful to raise her to know that. That she was a gift from God. That she was special. I would take her to the wilderness with me and teach her how to see and feel and listen, listen for God.

Then one day not too long ago, she came to me trembling, afraid. She finally she said she heard God speak. An angel came and told her that God had found favor with her. She had been chosen by God to bear God's Son, the Messiah. Before she is even married, God would cause her to be with child.

I asked, "So you are expecting?" She said yes...and I didn't believe her story. I believed she had sinned and made up this idea. ~~Even Joseph left her for a while.~~ I broke her heart. I wounded her deeply.

She went to live with her relative Elizabeth, then came back to Nazareth before leaving with Joseph for Bethlehem. The last words she said to me through tears were, "Papa, you're the reason. You're the reason this happened. You taught me to listen for God and when God speaks, say yes." "All I did," she said, "was say yes."

Now I don't know if I will see her again. I don't know if I'll ever be able to hold my grandchild.

How can something like this be of God? Look at how she will be treated by people. How will she ever manage to live in Nazareth again? Why would God put such a burden on somebody? And why do I feel I have to make a choice: either let God down in order to be faithful to my daughter, or let my daughter down in order to be faithful to God? (*turns to friend as if waiting for a reply.*) Well? Don't you have anything to say?

**Elias:** I thought you told me to listen?

**Joachim:** Elias, if you have something to say I could sure use it.

**Elias:** Joachim. Do you love your daughter?

**Joachim:** Of course I do.

**Elias:** Then do you really think you are disappointing the Almighty if you stand by her? (*pause*) Perhaps you're asking the wrong question. Instead of asking *why*, you should ask "*What if?*" What if God is in this? If Mary is right, then as strange as it sounds, God is working through all these things. And if that's the case, you will come to see it. And then what will it matter whether or not others see it?

**Joachim:** And if she's wrong?

**Elias:** If she's wrong then it means your daughter sinned, in which case your greatest sin would be that you loved your daughter anyway. If you ask me, that kind of love looks more like God than not. (*pats Joachim on shoulder as he walks off*) Time will tell.

*(walks off singing to himself...“Time will tell, time will tell, time will tell for you O Israel...”)*

Joachim: Will time tell, Lord? Will I know? ~~I can't begin to understand your ways. What you do and what you don't do. But you don't ask me to understand. You ask me to be faithful.~~ Why don't you make your way clearer to see? Why don't you make your way easier to know?

I fear Lord that I treated my daughter the way others treated me. That I judged her the same way others judged me. Why does being faithful have to be so hard? If I love only when people do the right things, could that be wrong? And if I can't love when they do wrong things, can that really be right?

I have always told you that whatever you tell me to do, the answer is yes. But what should I do? If you are behind this then Mary and Joseph and their baby will need all the support they can get. And if you're not, then it means they must be hurting and a child is still on the way, which means they still need support. Either way, the answer is the same isn't it?

So until you tell me different I'm going to act like you. For your nature is always to have mercy. Your righteousness falls on the just and the unjust alike. Until you show me what to do, I will act like you.

And if you will but give me the chance, I will welcome my daughter home. I will bless her family. And I will teach my grandchild to trust you. To love you. To act like you.

So let's make a deal you and I. You give me that chance, and I will say yes.

*(Piano begins softly (playing closing song?) as “Mary and child” walk up aisle and these words scroll on the screen:*

*After the birth of Jesus, Mary and Joseph stayed in Bethlehem for up to a year until an angel warned them to flee Herod and go to Egypt. They remained in Egypt for two years until Herod died. Then the angel told them to go home to Nazareth...*

*When Mary puts child in Joachim's arms MUSIC STOPS as Joachim begins singing a Jewish worship melody over child. Sound and lights fade completely. Then song, God Speaking, begins as cast exits.*