



## Christ United Methodist Church

301 Wooster St. · Marietta, OH 45750 740-373-1512  
www.christumcmarietta.org

**Date:** December 23, 2018

**Sermon:** Good News Worth Sharing

**Text:** Luke 1:39-45

**Speaker:** Pastor Don Archer

There is something in our human nature that seems to compel us to share good or exciting news with someone else. It is almost as if it is not true or real unless someone else hears it. Cell phones and the Internet have made sharing exciting news an immediate experience.

Having a child is one of those events that is so exciting, so life changing, that we just have to tell someone. Sometimes I will get a notice on Facebook that someone is having a baby and they will even post one of those sonogram photos. A grainy black and white picture that reveals nothing. I usually respond by saying that the baby looks just like her mother or father.

In today's gospel lesson we are given this beautiful glimpse into Mary's response to the news that she will have a child, a miracle child, a holy child. When the angel has explained and outlined all that will take place, and then departs from her, *Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.* Mary had to tell someone about this wonderful, mysterious, news. And who better to tell than her cousin Elizabeth. Elizabeth, who in her old age has conceived and is in her sixth month. Today's text is a description of their meeting. It is an account filled with joy and blessing and shared excitement. You can almost hear the delight, the sheer enthusiasm, between Mary and Elizabeth.

There is something very powerful that takes place whenever we can share a common experience with someone. It doesn't really matter what the experience is. I was sitting in a Dr.'s office waiting room, not long ago, and two other men, older men, were there. One of them looked up from his magazine at the other and asked: *Did you use to work at Dupont?* The other man said: *Yes, I did.* Almost immediately, they connected. One got up from his seat and moved closer to the other. They began swapping stories about when they worked at DuPont, who they knew, when they retired. It was interesting to observe how their body language changed from bored, anxious, to smiling and engaged. Their voices raising as they shared their experiences.

The same thing happens with veterans whenever they get together. Veterans, not only of military service, but veterans of heart surgery, or other medical procedures. Veterans of parenthood or grandparenting. Sharing stories about common ground, familiar challenges, and little victories.

Mary and Elizabeth were sharing their amazing stories. Stories that no one else could understand or believe. Stories about angels and disbelief and fear and joy and faith, all mixed up together. Two women who, for different reasons, were not supposed to be expecting the birth of a child, are

caught up in the wonder of that very reality. This may have been the happiest Christmas gathering, involving relatives, that the world has ever known. Two people expecting, anticipating, that for which they could offer no explanation.

Isn't that, in part, what Advent and Christmas is about? Expecting, anticipating that which we have no explanation for. God's gift of grace born of the flesh, living among us. How do you explain that? We try but it goes beyond logic and reason. Mary and Elizabeth could not explain it, but they certainly could celebrate it. There is joy and celebration and worship in their meeting in the hill country of Judea. Even the unborn JTB leaps for joy in his mother's womb when Mary arrives. It is an incredible scene.

Two women. One, elderly, past the age of being able to bare a child. Resigned to never being a mother. The other, a young girl, engaged but not married. Now, both have conceived under miraculous, if not scandalous, circumstances. There was only one other person that Mary could connect with and that was Elizabeth. There was only one person that Elizabeth could connect with and that was Mary. If Elizabeth had followed or observed proper social custom and behavior, she would not have welcomed Mary, but refused her. One who bears a child without the added burden of marriage.

Elizabeth opens her arms and her home to a relative whom her neighbors would expect her to reject. Instead of shaming Mary, she welcomes and blesses her. The pregnancy that could have brought Mary shame brings joy and honor instead. When Elizabeth welcomes Mary, she practices the same kind of inclusive love that Jesus will show to outcasts and sinners. Elizabeth sees beyond the shameful of Mary's situation to the reality of God's love at work even among those whom society rejects and excludes.

Elizabeth's hospitality challenges us to reflect on our own openness to the ways that God chooses to act in our world. What is God doing through unexpected people in our society today? Where is God at work through people whom we exclude or treat as shameful? Is our door, our heart, open to those that others would turn away?

May we, like Elizabeth and Mary, trust that God is present, even in our lives. May we, like them, celebrate that miracle. May we, like them, become a community that supports each other as we hope and wait. May we know the presence of God With Us to the degree that we simply have to share it with someone else. And what better time to do that than Christmas?

Amen.