

**Mary, Lady of Joy**

**12/17/2023**

**Scripture 1: (Lk. 1:26-56 ESV)**

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy-- the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God."

And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. 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? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."

And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever."

And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.

**Scripture 2: (Matt. 27:50-61, 28:1-8 ESV)**

And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.

And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many.

When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

There were also many women there, looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him, among whom were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph and the mother of the sons of Zebedee. When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut in the rock. And he rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men.

But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you." So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

**Scripture 3: (Lk. 24:10-11 ESV)**

Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.

## Sermon:

During this week of Advent we turn to the more common, conventional, and comfortable, familiar person of Mary, Jesus's mother. Apart from our first mother, Eve, she is the most well-known woman in all of sacred Scripture. She is as important to the story of our salvation: being the woman who bore our Redeemer; as Eve is: being the woman who gave us our need for salvation, being deceived by Satan.

- Eve “gave birth” to our need for salvation, while Mary gave birth to our Savior, the Person who purchased our salvation with His life and death.

Mary is such an important figure in the history of our Christian redemption that, as a woman, she even receives great honor and favorable remembrance by Muslims: as “Mirayim, the mother of Isa”; although there is some confusion about her within Islamic interpretation, as she also seems to be correlated or confused with Moses' sister Mirayim. However, the stories which they believe about her, draw more from the same fantastical late Christian era documents {the “Protoevangelium of James” or the “Gospel of James”} which have influenced the Roman church's traditions, misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and all of the many misapplications and idolatrousness with which they have surrounded her.

Ever since the time of the early church, Mary has been known rightly as the *theotokos*: a Greek term meaning “God-bearer”; which justly grants her the title “Mother of God”, because she was the mother of Jesus, God the Son. However, the early church refrained from confusing her status as Jesus' human mother with her receiving some extraordinary grace which is unattainable by ordinary humanity. *Theotokos* was a simple term, used quite simply, but that was changed later by the practices and decrees of Rome.

- Pope Pius IX defined the present Roman doctrine concerning Mary's “Immaculate Conception” on December 8<sup>th</sup>, 1854<sup>1</sup>, stating that Mary herself was sinless and herself perfectly holy and righteous; that “from the first moment of her conception, the Blessed Virgin Mary was, by the singular grace and privilege of Almighty God, and in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, Savior of Mankind, kept free from all stain of original sin.”, yet there is no Scriptural justification for such a statement.
- Furthermore, the Roman Church considers Mary as the “co-Mediatrix” and a “co-Redemptrix” with Christ, contrary to what Paul wrote to Timothy “*For there is one God, and there is **one mediator** between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.*” (1 Tim. 2:5-6 ESV). Even moreso those titles and what the Romans say they mean, and what the Roman's actually mean by them in their practice are actually two different things:
  - According to their dogma, they intend them to reference Mary's participative role in our redemption through her free will acceptance, affirmation, and consent to God's announced plan to her, her “*Let it be to me according to your word.*” (which still does not justify their use)<sup>2</sup>, where “Co” is meant as in, “to assist” God the Son, by her birthing and raising Jesus.;
  - But, by their practice, they become the focus and principal justification for them “praying to Mary”, for “praying the Rosary”, and the sole reason for them to “ask Mary” to pray for them. This is of course, a theological impossibility since Mary was/is only human and she does not possess any of the uniquely, divine attributes {incommunicable attributes; the attributes of God in which humanity

1 <https://www.marywood.edu/about/history/chronological/1854-solemnity-of-the-immaculate-conception/#::~text=The%20observance%20of%20this%20feast,I%20am%20the%20Immaculate%20Conception.%22>

2 <https://www.catholic.com/qa/isnt-calling-mary-the-mediatrix-of-all-graces-contrary-to-the-doctrine-that-jesus-is-the-sole>

does not share or reflect} like: omniscience or omnipresence; therefore, she cannot possibly hear or respond to everyone praying to her, much less understand these prayers or do anything about them considering that there are over 1.36 Billion Roman Catholics across the world (2020<sup>3</sup>), speaking in every language known to Man, during every minute, of every day. This then has the practical effect of the Romans elevating Mary to a status equal to, or even greater than, Jesus with in the divine economy in direct contradiction of Scripture (Isaiah 53:12, 59:16; Romans 8:26-27, 34; Hebrews 7:25-28).

- Or, to put it another way, even though it may seem a bit pejorative, “Roman Catholics pray to Mary, asking her to intercede with Jesus on their behalf; asking her, to ask Jesus, to ask God our Father for us, assuming that Jesus is more likely to do so, if His mother asks Him, since He is a 'good Jewish boy' who will always do what His mother asks...”.

But the plain reading of Scripture makes it very clear that all of the Roman's Mariology is just utter fantasy because, ever since Jesus was crucified:

- We ourselves now have direct access to God our Father (Matt 27:51), without a veil;
- We ourselves, can now go boldly before His throne of grace with our petitions (Hebrews 4:14-16);

because Jesus Himself said, *“In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.”* (Jn. 16:26-27 ESV); therefore, when we ask God for something in Jesus' Name, we are asking as if we are Jesus Himself asking.

Jesus has already completed all of the mediatorial work necessary, so we do not need to ask Mary or any of the saints, asleep in Christ Jesus, to mediate before the LORD for us. We get to go directly to Him ourselves and cry *“Abba! Father!”* (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6). The Roman practice of offering prayers to Mary or the Saints is just as ineffective, and as sinfully idolatrous as Ba'alite worship and every other pagan ritual, and requires their true repentance; for by faith in Jesus Christ alone and through God's grace, even these sins can be forgiven.

But why do I belabor this point? I bring these things to our awareness because there is so much which we might think that we know about Mary, we must first clear away the idolatrous fantasies and falsehoods before we can focus on what Scripture, the Holy Bible, truthfully tells us about Mary and her joy.

- Mary is **not** the “Queen of Heaven” but yes, she is still extraordinarily blessed among all women because she alone enjoys the privilege of the special mother/son relationship with Jesus.
- Mary is not extraordinarily special or blessed in any divine sense; she is still only merely human.
- Mary is a sinner, saved by God's grace alone, through faith in Jesus, and is thus no different from any of us.

So now, with that clarified, let us consider Luke's account.

*“In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary.”*

Depending upon the calendar referenced by Luke, the Gentile doctor, the “sixth month” could mean:

3 <https://dornsife.usc.edu/iacs/2022/04/30/global-christianity/#:~:text=In%20February%202022%2C%20the%20Vatican,28%25%20living%20in%20South%20America.>

- September/October (if using the Mosaic “ecclesiastical” calendar, based upon when Passover occurs; lunar year);
- March (if using the post-Exilic “civil” calendar); or,
- June (if following the Gentile Julian Calendar imposed by {Julius} Caesar in 45 BC).

Thus with so many possibilities, it is easy to see why people will argue over precisely when Jesus' birthday actually, truly was. But notice that if one uses the “civil calendar” {which I think is actually the most likely, because that was the one commonly used by Second Temples Jews (who would avoid the Julian calendar because of its pagan veneration via the month names) and would thus have been his common research reference (from his Jewish sources in Roman Judea: both documents and people)} a date within December is the end of the nine month period of human gestation, therefore our celebration of Christmas is within the ballpark, even if the particular date of December 25th {of our celebration} may have been chosen for purely arbitrary reasons {meanwhile, the Greek and other Orthodox traditions celebrate Christmas on January 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> in part due to subtle differences between the Julian and Gregorian calendars; so they are still pretty close}. Regardless, that is not a debate we are going to settle once and for all because the remembrance and celebration of Christ's Incarnation is **what** is important, not **when** we celebrate it.

Here Luke gives us three specific details in this one sentence; ordinary details with extraordinary importance:

- Nazareth, “*a city of Galilee*”;
  - Nazareth being located in Galilee is important because it connects Jesus to one of Isaiah's Messianic prophecies {which Luke feels no need to mention at this time} (Isaiah 9:1-7), “... *but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.*” (Isa. 9:1 ESV).;
- Joseph, “*of the house of David*”;
  - Naming Joseph as belonging to the house and lineage of King David directly connects him and his fiancée' to the Jewish Messianic hope. This is an important detail because at that time, the line of Davidic kings was shattered: first, by the Babylonians and Persians; then, by the Levitical Hasmonean dynasty which arose in the wake of the Maccabean revolt; and finally, by the establishment and support of the Idumean Herod (an Edomite), as a “client-king” of the Roman Empire. Apart from this divine hope, the “House of David” was utterly irrelevant and without influence or authority in Judean politics or society {and had been since the time of Zerubbabel, the Persian governor}.; and
- Mary, “*a virgin betrothed*”.
  - Mary's physical and marital status defined her present relationship with Joseph. It is well documented that among Jews during the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, whenever a couple became engaged they were “technically” married. They were, for all intents and purposes, already considered as husband and wife {which is why Joseph considered “divorcing” her (Matt 1:19)}. However, the time of their engagement was also an important period in their relationship, because during this time the husband would establish and provide for their home {typically by constructing an attachment onto his parent's existing structure}. Then, after this was completed, the groom would collect his bride from her parents home, bring her into his household, and finally consummate the marriage. So, this detail tells

us that although Mary and Joseph were formally united, the marriage had not yet been physically completed and finalized.

- It is because of this social status that her visit from Gabriel held the potential, not only for social scandal and controversy, but also incredulity and amazement!

When the angel Gabriel {Gabriel means “mighty man of God” in Hebrew} appeared to her, frightening her with his unusual greeting to her, “*Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!*” and told her the wonderful news which he had been tasked to bring, “*And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.*”, Mary did not react as joyfully as we would want to expect. The angel's announcement is oddly specific, but apart from the last sentence it would not have been an overly strange blessing or pronouncement to be given a young, betrothed girl because everyone would be wishing her to give birth to a son, first and quickly. That was a normal, ordinary, worldly hope for every newly married Jewish couple. But, instead of being joyful or reacting with great gladness, Mary was “*greatly troubled*” and responded to this news by saying, “*How will this be, since I am a virgin?*”. Clearly she understood that this was not just an ordinary “well-wisher's” hope.

Mary's reactionary question emphasizes her surprise, uncertainty, and her fear concerning this news. It shows that she immediately recognized Gabriel was telling the truth. She understood that what he said would absolutely, completely, and entirely come to pass precisely as he said. She had an immediate expectation that this would not happen through the ordinary way of things. Her response could also be seen implying the underlying question, “But what about Joseph?”.

“*And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy-- the Son of God."*”. Gabriel's response informs her that this will be the monergistic work of God. He explains that the LORD, God Himself will be the child's Father, in truth and in fact, without really explaining how it would happen. Joseph was being benched because God would be the “Starter”, to avoid the transmission of Adam's corrupted nature (so that He would receive no inheritance from Adam, because Jesus would not be Adam's son) and also so that Jesus, the son of Mary, would be the prophesied Offspring and Heir to Eve, apart from her husband's effort.

It was only in this way that Jesus could be born holy and divine, while also sharing in our humanity.

Yet one might ask, “If God made the first Adam from the dust of the earth, then why could God not just make the second Adam in the same way?”, but that has a straightforward answer, “Because then the second Adam would not share in our same human nature, He would not be our kinsman (He would be entirely unrelated to us) and so He would be ineligible to justly or rightly redeem us.”

The Incarnation of God the Son, His self-identification with us, His human nature was a righteous necessity in God's eternal plan for our salvation.

Thus “*Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."*”

Many people have had problems with this text in the recent past, challenging it and using it to say evil things about the LORD. Militant, liberal feminists have claimed that this was a case of divine rape, arguing that Mary's pregnancy was forced upon her by God; saying that she had no choice or that she was coerced into saying “Yes”, but that is not how God works. Yes, even Jonah was not forced to go to Ninevah, he was “persuaded” to what God commanded, eventually.

God does not and will not offend against our free will, our free choices of action {which is different than our spiritual choice for salvation}. God did not first choose Mary to receive this honor and blessing and then impose His sovereign will upon her. God chose to give her this honor and blessing, back before the foundation of the world, choosing to give her His Spirit and open her heart to receive it with gladness; to accept it and obey Him and fulfill His eternal decree.

God chose Mary, knowing that Mary would gladly say “Yes”, because God had created her and inclined her heart, mind, and soul to want to say “Yes” and to want to obey Him; just as He inclines all of us who believe in and trust in Him for our salvation to want to say “Yes” and to want to obey Him in all things, including our affirmative response to His call upon our life.

So, Mary was willing. Mary was willing to submit herself to God's sovereign will and Mary's faithful, obedient response prefigures Jesus' response in the garden of Gethsemane, “*Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.*” (Lk. 22:42 ESV); like mother, like Son.

Yet still Mary, the betrothed but not yet consummated bride, was presently faced with a very real human problem: an unplanned, unexpected, overly early pregnancy; and she was going to have to manage that. Although for a young bride to discover that she is pregnant was ordinarily cause for joy, despite the eternal and joyful implication of Gabriel's news, Mary's pregnancy was not the most joyful news for her.

I mean, while I can imagine the joy she (as a good Jewish girl) should feel, hearing that the “hope of Israel” was about to be achieved and that the deliverance of her people was near at hand, she had a more immediate personal concern. While she believed the angel, he also gave her a sign to help remove her doubt and fear. He told her about Elizabeth, her relative who “*...in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. **For nothing will be impossible with God.***”. Elizabeth's pregnancy was given to Mary as a sign, to prove that God's Word and God's promises are both true and reliable, given to encourage her in hope, believing that God would somehow provide for her.

This explains the curious note in verse 24, “*After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden...*” (Lk. 1:24 ESV); where, because of her age (and likely because of past ridicule for her barrenness) Elizabeth had chosen to remain out of the public eye. So, Gabriel's announcement of her pregnancy was a surprise for Mary; it was not common knowledge, and was surely kept hidden from the rest of the family. This is why Mary “*...went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.*”, to see if what the angel had told her was really true. If Gabriel was correct about Elizabeth, then her feeling about what He said to her must also be true. If the aged Elizabeth was also pregnant, then Mary could also take comfort and be joyful because of the angel's final reminder and promise, that “*...nothing will be impossible with God.*”

When Mary arrived at the home of Elizabeth and Elizabeth heard her, “*...the baby leaped in her womb.*”. This child, who would one day baptize countless Israelites, call them to repentance, tell them to return to faith in the LORD, and direct them to Jesus; this unborn baby responded to Mary's presence by leaping for joy, recognizing and knowing that she carried the source of True Life within her.

The first human person to recognize and rejoice knowing that Jesus Christ is LORD, was a baby not yet born. How can any person say that life does not begin at conception?

Now with this example of Elizabeth and the unborn John, we can see that God's promise to Mary was already inspiring joy within others. Then we get to see her worldly anxiety and fear be transformed by faith and trust in God.

*“And Mary said, ‘My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.’”*

Finally, Mary's ultimate response to Gabriel's news was to rejoice! Mary rejoiced because God Himself was her Savior: hers' personally and also corporately as God's Chosen People, Israel. Mary rejoiced because she believed God and because she trusted in the fulfillment of all His promises. Mary's response of joy is what every Christian echoes when we believe and understand that God's Word is true; that Christ has come to save us (to rescue you and me) from ourselves. Then, possessing such joy, our lives are to be transformed by it and be filled with it.

The Apostle Paul commands us to, *“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.”* (Phil. 4:4 ESV) because the life of every Christian should exemplify the joy we feel and have through faith in Jesus Christ. But joy is more than just an emotion. The “emotional high” which we feel on account of our joy in the LORD fades quickly; but it does not disappear from the believer. It either takes root deep within us or it is washed away and lost, being a moment of “mere sensuality” (Luke 8:5-15, v. 13). True joy: the joy which we experience in Christ, the joy in which we share along with Mary; becomes our state of being when we believe in and trust Jesus.

We just heard Mary sing about this life changing joy but if she is our “Lady of Joy”, then how did this joy change and transform her life? To answer that question, we turn to the end of Matthew's Gospel.

*“And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.*

*And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many.*

*When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, ‘Truly this was the Son of God!’*

*There were also many women there, looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him, among whom were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph [also the mother of Jesus, since elsewhere in Matthew (Mt 13:55) His brothers were named as: James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas] and the mother of the sons of Zebedee. When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut in the rock. And he rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb. (Matt. 27:50-61)*

So it becomes clear to us, that Mary was filled with the joy of the LORD from the beginning of Jesus' life, through His death, and beyond into His resurrection. That is the only reasonable explanation for how she handled everything.

She was present at His death “looking on from a distance”, watching the child she bore, suffer and die in the worst, most torturous, and humiliating manner devised by mankind: the child whom Gabriel had promised would possess the throne of King David, who would reign over Israel, and whose kingdom would never end.



- Was she wondering whether God's promises truly had failed? Was she wondering whether it had all been a lie, or was she still trusting to hope?
- Was she fearful about what might happen to her and her surviving sons, now that the wrath of the Jews and Romans was kindled against her firstborn? {It was not uncommon in Roman culture to punish (execute) whole families for the transgressions of one member, especially if it were the familial head (which Jesus would have been as the eldest son).} Did she fear for the remainder of her life to come, or was she still resting in God's peace?
- Was she second guessing herself and her whole life, worrying that she was the reason for Jesus's belief in Himself as the Messiah? Was she hating herself, believing that she was the cause of His destruction? Or, was she hating God for this apparent failure, for bringing her to grief, and for letting her son die, or was she still filled and comforted by God's love for her, for Jesus, and for His Chosen People?

We are all moved by the story of Jesus; no human person that reads or hears His story today can avoid being emotionally effected by it, unless they have no heart or soul; even Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and other pagan people allow themselves to be touched by His story. So, when you consider everything that Mary had gone through over the previous 34 years, any ordinary person who was trusting in their own understanding and relying upon their own strength, should now be an utterly broken, total wreck of a human, but Mary was not.

Mary was not a wreck. She was neither destroyed nor broken. Yes, she was hurting. Yes, she was grieving. Yes, she was in emotional and spiritual pain, just as Simeon had prophesied in the Temple “*Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.*” (Lk. 2:34-35 ESV). But even still, she carried on in joy because joy in Christ Jesus does not always equal happiness, pleasure, or even a good feeling. Being joyful is the Christian's state of being because, in this joy, we are constantly being filled and sustained by God's Holy Spirit.

Therefore, even in the midst of this great sorrow, Mary remained joyful. She was joyful as:

- She watched her firstborn die.
- She saw Him entombed.

Then, her hope in the LORD was satisfied when she witnessed another angel come down from heaven, roll the stone away from the tomb, and announce news which was even more joyful than Gabriel's, “*Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men.*”

*But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you."* So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and **great joy**, and ran to tell his disciples.” (Matt. 28:1-8 ESV). Jesus was alive. Death could not hold God's Son, the Lord and Giver of Life.

He is Risen! <He is Risen, Indeed!>

Mary was joyful as:

- She was shown the empty space where she had seen Him lain.
- She was commanded to go tell His disciples that “He is Risen!” <He is Risen, Indeed!>
- She was promised that she would get to see Jesus again, alive and whole, up in Galilee.

Thus, just as she believed Gabriel, but without any need of further confirmation, she and the other women with her “...*departed quickly from the tomb with fear and **great joy**, and ran to tell his disciples.*”. Truly, Mary was a faithful and obedient women and she was truly blessed because she was joyful in her obedience and faithfulness.

Hearing the good news of the resurrection, she was filled with both “*fear* (fear, reverence, and awe of God and His authority over both life and death) *and great joy* (knowing that her Son lives, that God is truly faithful and gracious to His people)”. Therefore, because of this, she went and she wanted to share the same Good News about what God has done for her, about what God has done for His people, about what God has done for us. Mary may well be described as being one of the first evangelists after Jesus' resurrection.

Christian Evangelism is the best evidence of a joy filled life. When you are joy-filled, your first and greatest inclination is to share the joy which is found in Christ Jesus with other people, because you want them to experience this same joy also; because you want them to know Jesus and to love Him as you do, as He loves us.

Mary's joy was able to sustain her hope in Christ. It helped her to rest in God's peace, through God's love for her. So too for everyone who believes on Jesus Christ, alone.

This Advent season, as we anticipate all of the fun in our celebration and remembrance of Jesus' birth, I encourage each of us to examine our own faith. I encourage each of us to look for the marks and helps of: hope, peace, love, and joy: which the Holy Spirit has given to us and to let them overflow out from our lives, as we share them with others.

If you find one or more of these lacking, do not worry or be discouraged, because God does not give out His gifts in equal measure. Instead, pray and ask God for more; ask God to give you an extra portion and to help you become more like these women (and other exemplars of faith described in Scripture, or whom you have known). Ask in faith and trust that the LORD will provide all that you need. Then, let His joy fill and transform your life, as it did Mary's, so that then you will be able to “*Rejoice in the LORD, always.*” and then go out and share this joy with everyone you meet.

**AMEN**