



CAYMAN ISLANDS REGIONAL MISSION COUNCIL

WEEKLY UPDATE

December 15, 2021

VOLUME 6 ISSUE 50

UCJCI 42nd SYNOD THEME 2021 – Rooted, Resilient: Responding in HOPE (Health, Opportunity, Peace, Evangelism)

The Sunday of Love

During the first three Sundays, -and weeks- of Advent, Christians around the world focused on the themes of Hope, Peace, and Joy as essential aspects of our faith. Now, that we have arrived at the final week of this season, we complete our spiritual journey and preparation for Christmas by focusing on Love.

The miracle of Christmas is the wonderful love of God which was poured out into this world and into every heart that is ready to receive Jesus. He is the love of God in human form, the Love Incarnate, the embodiment of God’s love.

The love of God, Jesus, breathes life into the deepest part of our broken and wayward hearts. It changes and transforms us into a new being, a new creation.

How comforting and empowering to know, to embrace, and be embraced by this amazing love. Amid our loneliness, confusion, pain, grief, hopelessness, and disillusionment He comes and in Him, we find acceptance, understanding, healing, hope, peace, and joy. Jesus is, indeed, the greatest gift of all! The priceless gift, the gift that is freely given, the gift that is so much needed!

Indeed, for these reasons, we celebrate! We celebrate His coming. We celebrate His rich, abundant, and unconditional love not only on Christmas day but every day of our lives.

*“For God so loved the world
that he gave his one and only Son,
that whoever believes in him shall not perish
but have eternal life.”
(John 3:16)*



October – December 2021 Theme The Centrality of Christ in the Season

Lectionary Readings YEAR C

Fourth Sunday in Advent

Micah 5:2–5a
Psalm 80:1-7

Hebrews 10:5–10
Luke 1:39–45

In Focus

The Blessed Child

The encounter between Mary and Elizabeth is a testimony of what happens when Jesus is given a chance to dwell in our hearts. Carrying Jesus in her womb changed everything about Mary. The words of Elizabeth, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear” are worthy of contemplating on during this season.

The Unexpected and Unimaginable Love of God

By Rev. Rohan Forrester (Chair of CIRMC)

Please read Luke 1:39–45, (46–55)

How do people know that we love them?
Do people like being around us because we are loving?

The fourth Sunday of Advent signals to us that Christmas is near. But it is also the time to look at yet another of our Advent themes – God’s Love.

The importance of God’s love is repeated over and over in the Advent stories. In the Advent stories, we see God’s love manifested:

- In Unusual Times
- In Unusual Places
- In Unusual People

The Greek word agape, tells us about the nature and scope of God’s love. Agape is the unconditional “self-giving love” of God that comes to everyone in Jesus Christ.

Most people in our culture have gotten used to the ordinariness of life. We go to work or school every day, come home, relax for a bit, go to sleep, and do the same thing the next day. And we expect to continue following this same pattern until we retire, at which time we establish a new ordinary routine to follow. Even in the life of the Church, we have gotten used to certain routines. We gather for a set time for worship, prayer, and Bible study. At each of these gatherings, we pretty much know what to expect. But what if God wants us to get out of the ordinary? God is calling all of us to live a life of extraordinary dependence upon God in this time of Advent and pandemic. God wants us to live by faith, not by sight. God wants us to stop expecting what we've always expected to get out of life and start expecting to see God move in extraordinary ways. God wants us to expect the unexpected measure of God's unconditional love.

We will always find it difficult when we try to measure God's love for us with our expectations. The truth is that many times our expectations are a long way off. Many times our expectations are driven by nothing more than emotion. Many times our expectations are uninformed and naïve and not informed by our faith. We have the audacity sometimes to question God's motives when God doesn't fulfill our expectations. We have the insolence to even doubt that God loves us just because God didn't do what we wanted God to do when we wanted God to do it in the way we wanted it done.

After indicating his purpose for writing this gospel in verses 1-4, Luke immediately commenced his account by introducing Zacharias, the father-to-be of John the Baptist. It's interesting that as Luke begins to tell the story of Jesus, he doesn't begin with Jesus himself. He doesn't even begin with Mary and Joseph. Luke begins with Zechariah and Elizabeth that culminated in the visit from Mary. The encounter between Mary and Elizabeth is a testimony of what happens when God's expectations are met with our expectations of what God can do. This story is also about the misguided expectations that people had of the coming Messiah.

The gospel of Luke places high regard for women and in particular, the two accounts of Elizabeth, the soon-to-be mother of John the Baptist, and Mary, the mother-to-be of the Messiah. Here we have in our text today, two pregnant women taking center stage. Mary and Elizabeth share a bond and relationship that goes beyond words. Both Mary and Elizabeth received good news and were experiencing major life transitions. Mary is clearly the principal character in this portion of the gospel, however, Elizabeth, her relative is also shown to be a remarkable woman. Both were humble women of no social or economic standing. Elizabeth was the wife of Zacharias the priest and carried the social stigma of having no children. Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth were both descendants of Aaron (v. 5) and were "righteous in the sight of God" (v. 6). They did not have any children, however, and now that they were advanced in age, it would take a miracle for them ever to do so. Mary was a humble peasant girl. She did not have any social standing due to her parentage or class. Mary's life was now torn apart. Pregnant before her wedding... meant her parents would disown her...her fiancé is preparing for divorce...and the whole community could stone her to death. Yet the worship of both of these women is such that they are

models of devotion. However, when one thinks of women of the ancient world, we can't help but think of their limitations where men assumed leadership roles, especially in spiritual matters. The women seemed only fit for fixing meals and bearing children.

These two women were, however, visited by the angel Gabriel and told to expect the unexpected. Elizabeth's child was unexpected because Elizabeth had always been barren! Mary's child was unexpected because she was a virgin! Two unlikely women would become pregnant. They would each have a son. Both children would be great. And the angel even told each of them what they should name their child. Except for the message that Gabriel brought to Mary was even more unbelievable. Verse 27: She was a virgin! Verse 32: Her child would be the Son of the Most High! And He would be King over Israel! Verse 33: And His reign as King would never end!

Having heard that bit of news from the angel Gabriel, Mary like Elizabeth and Zacharias welcomed the news with some amount of trepidation. Although Mary, after a while seemed to have become excited about what was going to happen, she thought of no one else to talk to about this, but her relative Elizabeth. So, she quickly went to tell her relative Elizabeth about it. Mary knew Elizabeth would understand because she was in a very similar situation. We read that 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. When Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. Before Mary could say much, John the Baptist starts to fulfill his prophetic role. It was John's job to point to Jesus as being the Christ. He started doing this even before he was born when he leaped in his mother's womb! (v. 41). 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." Here we see what happens when Jesus is given a chance to dwell in our hearts. Carrying Jesus in her womb changed everything about Mary. The words of Elizabeth are worthy of contemplating during this advent season. Let us now examine Mary's response in song at the greeting of Elizabeth:

Mary's Song

There are several parts to Mary's response to the greeting of Elizabeth: In the first part, Mary praises God for including her in God's mission of love extended to all peoples. It was unexpected and now her reality. Mary seems immediately to respond to the praise of Elizabeth by offering her own praise to God. These two women believed God...but at this moment... they are realizing how real it is...and the Holy Spirit is filling them with joy. Mary says her spirit "rejoices"... she breaks out in joy. The life inside her is a declaration that God does come and set things right ... and indeed has come to her. God has looked with favor on the lowliness of God's servant, Mary. For this reason, all generations will indeed call me blessed, she says, not because of me, but because of what God is doing through me.

It is God who is praised and honored for enabling Mary to be part of God's world-changing work of God's love to everyone.

God desires to have a personal relationship with each of us and Mary models for us how to respond to this great invitation. She trusts that God wants to do this great work in her, and recognizes what a privilege this is for her. She sees that it is entirely God's doing – she is merely saying yes, knowing that her response has ramifications for the whole world. Mary's words are prophetic and what she declares is profound. This is what happens when two people meet who have said yes to God in their lives, like Mary and her relative Elizabeth; the new life of God that is growing in them leaps for joy in recognition of one another. It is like God in one greeting God in the other. Mary realized that she was blessed, that a great thing had happened in her life. She saw the source of God's unconditional love reaching everyone through her. Mary makes no effort to minimize God's greatness. She accepts it - fully, joyfully, lovingly, and expectantly. Her great song of praise is a glorious expression of Mary's hope.

In Mary's response, there is no false humility, rather, tremendous praise and prayer. In her expression we find there is true humility of knowing that all that is being accomplished in her is being accomplished by God, "for the Mighty One has done great things for me," she exclaimed. Mary had probably never prayed that she would become pregnant before she got married. The attitude Mary expresses in her second response reveals not doubt, but humility (v. 38). This humble attitude is further revealed in what she does next in the story.

In the second part, Mary describes what God's agenda means for human history. Mary reveals God's activity in our world: God scatters the arrogant, pulls down the mighty, sends the rich away empty. This is not to punish them but to shock them into a change of heart and behavior towards the poor. The prophetic tone in Mary's revolutionary song shows that God respects the poor, exalts the poor, cares for the poor, feeds the poor, remembers the poor, and helps the poor.

Only the lowly and oppressed are promised eternal joy with God. Out of her feeling of joy and love by God who chose her for this task of bearing the Messiah of the world, Mary sang about her understanding of the far-reaching global impact of God's love for the poor, marginalized, voiceless, and those who are met with injustice:

"He has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed.." – Luke 1:48

"His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation." – Luke 1:50

"He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble". – Luke 1:52

"The hungry he fills with good things while the rich are sent empty away." The 'hungry' are those who are aware that they have nothing of themselves and that all is a gift from God. The rich are those who think they have it all when in truth, they have nothing that lasts. It is a teaching that will go right through the Gospels. We look forward to the day when God will satisfy the hungry, bring justice, peace, and humble the proud – where equity becomes the love language in the world economies.

God's unexpected measure of love that extends to humanity is being experienced in Mary's spirit. That is where the love of Christmas can be experienced in each of us when we invite Jesus into our hearts.

Finally, Mary links what God has accomplished in her with the conception of Jesus to the promise that God made in the past: Mary's words or song expands to include all Israel. God had helped Israel in the past and has come to help her now. God had promised this to father Abraham and his descendants. God helped Israel in remembrance of God's mercy, according to the promise made to Abraham and Sarah: that all humanity would be blessed through their faithfulness and their trust in the goodness and mercy of God.

It is clear that Mary's child was not her own. The Savior wasn't just her Savior, but the Savior of all who would believe in Him. Mary would remain with Elizabeth for three months and share the experience of pregnancy and extend the bonds of kinship between them.

Today, we get to choose whether we want to be part of God's mission of transformation bringing about hope, peace, joy, and love or whether we want to give in to the hatred, bitterness, inequality, injustice, strife, anger, pride, and divisiveness. Today we can release all our anger, pain, pride, misunderstanding, and frustration into the loving presence of God who demonstrates his love for us in Jesus Christ.

It was over 400 years after the last prophetic word of promise of a Messiah until Jesus was conceived. Today, we are recipients of this same unexpected presence and love of God all the time: whatever it is, it's going to be alright because Jesus loves us in unexpected ways. We can always expect the unexpected love of God. So, this Christmas, maybe more than others, let us welcome into our lives the Holy Child of Bethlehem and trust him to reign with justice, love, and peace.

Although this Christmas might be different, it's not the same as a hug or the fellowship shared over a meal in past. Yet God's love is not affected by the virus and His power isn't limited by social distancing. It is still possible to show God's love in a real way that touches the heart of the receiver at this time, even from a distance and wearing a mask.



On December 5, 2021 Amber McLaughlin was baptized and confirmed in the Webster Memorial United Church (Bodden Town).

Savannah United Church

On Sunday December 5, 2021, ten members were received into the fellowship at the Savannah United Church. For the first time in our church's history, a member overseas was received via technology. Four children and six adults were welcomed into fellowship by our Elders and congregation.



South Sound United Church

Defying the challenges caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the Youth and Sunday School Ministry of the South Sound United Church presented a 'Virtual Nativity' Christmas Program via Zoom on December 12, 2021. It was a true delight to see the faces and hear the voices of the children and youth who have been absent from Sunday services for several weeks. The Sunday School teachers and members of the Leadership Team, along with the assistance of the parents, put together a truly memorable program presenting the true spirit of Christmas.



UPCOMING EVENTS

December 18. (Saturday)

11:00am - John Gray Memorial **Community Christmas Meal**

December 19. (Sunday) 4th Sunday of Advent (LOVE)

10:00am - Savannah UC **Youth Christmas Programme**
6:00pm - Elmslie Memorial **Christmas Production** -in the Courtyard

December 24. (Friday) Christmas Eve

6:30 pm - John Gray Memorial **Carol Service** in the Car park with Light Refreshments
6:30 pm - Elmslie **Joint Charge Candle Light Service**
7:00 pm - Webster Memorial

December 25. (Saturday) Christmas Day

8:00 am - Savannah United (Joined Charge service)
8:30 am - William Pouchie Memorial
9:00 am - Elmslie Memorial (Joined Charge service)
10:00 am - East End United

December 26. (Sunday) 1st Sunday in Christmas

December 27. (Monday)

Public Holiday for Christmas Day

December 28. (Tuesday)

Public Holiday for Boxing Day

December 31. (Friday) Watch Night

10:30 pm - Elmslie Memorial (Joined Charge service)
10:30 pm - Savannah United (Joined Charge service)
11:00 pm - John Gray Memorial
11:00 pm - Webster Memorial
11:00 pm - William Pouchie Memorial
11:00 pm - East End United (Joined Charge service)

January 02. (Sunday) 2nd Sunday in Christmas


January 03. (Monday)

Public Holiday for New Year's Day




on Radio Cayman 89.9
every Sunday at 7:45 am

December 19, 2021
Rev. Rohan Forrester



Savannah United Church
YVIP & Youth Department

presents





Backstage the
Christmas Pageant

A memorable Christmas musical of drama, song and rap to remind us of the importance of the players in His beloved story.

SUNDAY 19TH DECEMBER, 2021 @ 10 A.M.

JOIN US THROUGH LIVE STREAM
@ SAVANNAH UNITED CHURCH - CAYMAN ISLANDS

UCJCI Lay Training Institute



TRAINING FOR LAY LEADERS 2022

Offered in collaboration with The International University of the Caribbean

Get Ready to Serve!



MODULE 1 BEGINS FEBRUARY 12, 2022

TRAINING FEATURES

- Weekend and Weekday classes
 - Saturdays 9 a.m. - 2 p.m.
 - Thursdays 6 - 8 p.m. (2nd and 4th Saturdays and Thursday in the immediate week following)
- Combination of Learning in Virtual Classrooms via Zoom and in Learners' own time

ORIENTATION JANUARY 29, 2022

REGISTER NOW through your Regional Mission Council office

For more information:
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The **John Gray Memorial United Church (West Bay)** is seeking to fill the position of Youth Minister and invites dynamic, highly motivated and qualified candidates to tender their applications.


For more details (job description and remuneration) please contact jgmcminister@gmail.com

If you are sensing a call to this ministry, we invite you to submit your letter of application, curriculum vitae and a brief statement of your faith journey to jgmcminister@gmail.com

WE NEED YOU!!!



*Continue to pray for the
Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love of
Jesus Christ
in the
hearts, homes, nations, and the
World of humankind*



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