

**SERMON: "PREPARE YE..."** *For the Unknown."*

Rev. Geoff Ross, Sunday, December 12, 2021, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

*"There are known knowns — there are things we know we know,"* Donald Rumsfeld, President George W Bush's Defense Secretary, famously proclaimed in a press conference in February 2002. *"We also know there are known unknowns — that is to say, we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns, the ones we don't know we don't know."* Despite being a master class in political double-talk, what he was saying isn't wrong: there are known knowns/known unknowns/unknown unknowns – always have been/always will be. It's all part of being human/fallible/fallen. The problem is; we don't like being in the dark/not knowing – because it makes us feel scared/uncertain: Not knowing tells us that we're not in control.

*[Known/knowns: obvious/understood with equally obvious/understood actions expected. Known/unknowns: things you know you need to know but don't yet. Unknown/unknowns: things you didn't even know you needed to know/find out about. Unknown/knowns: things others have been there/done that – new to you/but knowledge/experience out there. Pregnancy/child birth/parenting definitely fall under this category: where our reading comes in.]*

Over the past two weeks we've heard how God's angel – Gabriel – came to both Mary/Elizabeth – technically Zechariah [chronologically: 1<sup>st</sup> – Elizabeth (6 months), 2<sup>nd</sup> – Mary] and pronounced that it was God's will/plan that they would each become pregnant/bear sons, and that Elizabeth's son – John – would *"be great in the sight of the Lord;"/ "be filled with the Holy Spirit;"/and he will "make ready a people prepared for the Lord."* And, Mary, is told that she will name her son *"Jesus;"/that He "will be holy; he will be called Son of God."* And, both of them, in answer to their doubts/questions, were told that *"nothing will be impossible with God."* (Luke 1:13-37 selected verses) God's plans, it seems, interrupt ours. And, they also seem to be on a 'need to know' basis.

*[RER/discovered pregnant with who would become HDR, we did what every parents-to-be did; bought books – especially/ "What to Expect when You're Expecting" – a book of lies wrapped up in platitudes designed to calm your fears/anxieties as, every day, your body/lives change in new/unknown ways.... Sure, others have gone through it: but it's your body/life/world that's changing – and that's unsettling/worrying/unnerving/uncomfortable.]*

Both women, suddenly/unexpectantly/inexplicably pregnant didn't know what to do – but knew that their lives had changed: What would happen to them?/How were they going to explain this to family/parents/friends?/How were they going to be treated by their community?/Would they be cast out?/Abandoned? Their lives were no long simple/straightforward/known. We're told that immediately after she became pregnant, Elizabeth went into "seclusion" for five months – and that Mary feared the social disgrace of Joseph refusing to marry her. With their lives/world turned upside-down/inside-out/sideways, unexpectedly facing an uncertain future, what did they do? What would you do?/be tempted to do?

*[ "Temptation": Latin/ "temptare" - "handle"/"test"/"try" often combined with a sense/desire to do/test/try something different/unwise/that you know is wrong. Worst decisions are made when we're scared/unsure/reacting to what we don't know. Fear of missing out often leads us down the wrong path/astray.]*

Mary could have done nothing/stayed put in Nazareth – like Elizabeth, she could've gone into seclusion/curled up in a ball/cry about how life/world/God is 'so unfair!' Or, she could have become paralyzed with fear/made excuses why she didn't want to do it/go with God down this unknown path. [Sound familiar?] But, she didn't. The text tells us she sought out Elizabeth so that they could help each other to embrace the unknown of God's plan. And, with a kick, God's presence is felt immediately – giving them the courage to face the “*ventures of which we cannot see the ending/paths as yet untrodden/through perils unknown.*” (Lutheran Prayer) This is because, if we prepare ourselves to place our trust in God, this isn't a journey God calls us to take alone.

*[Philippians Reading: “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.”/“The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything,” This is our hope/joy! Remainder of LP: “Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us/and your love supporting us; Amen.”]*

There is more. Did you catch what Elizabeth says? She calls Mary “*the mother of my Lord!*” Mary's joy becomes our joy: Her son, Jesus; is THE/OUR Lord! The One through whom “*all things were made*” possible; Emmanuel – God with us/God in the flesh/as us/die for us/save us – destroy our darkness/fears/overcome our doubts/fears/to go with us where we cannot go alone so He could call us to Him in/through God's redeeming love/grace. And, what did Mary say/do in response? She begins to sing: “*My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior*”(Luke 1:46-47). In response to all of her unknown/unknowns, Mary prepared/made way for God's plan in her life – and, she did it with great joy! And her song can be our song as well! Yes, the world is an uncertain place, but we can rejoice the good news of God's promise of salvation in/through Jesus while we wait! Amen.