

December 9, 2012

**Scripture Lessons**      *Philippians 1:3-11*  
*Luke 1:26-38*

**Sermon**            *Surprise!*

I don't know if you remember Micki, but, I texted you last night and said I had been out a little bit too late and you were going to take the sermon for me to day. Didn't you get my text? One, Two, Three SURPRISE!

**Well**, the world is filled with surprises which force us at times to take a new look at the way we think and the way we live our lives. And if my little experiment has been successful this morning I surprised you in a couple of ways. .First I strayed from the usual way I start sermons but secondly, I did it by giving Micki a hard time which we don't often do because Micki is such a great person.

Our Gospel lesson for today tells the story, though, of another kind of surprise; the visit angel Gabriel to Mary. I wonder what could be more shocking than a heavenly messenger informing a common woman that she will bear the Son of God. Mary's reactions are what you might expect them to be. At first she was stunned by the news and she asked the angel how in the world can this be? But as Gabriel speaks God's promises, Mary doubts seems to eventually depart and she accepts the message as truth and she offers herself to God as a willing servant. I wonder how you and I would have responded to God, if God had come to us with such a promise. I know especially the men amongst us would have been pretty surprised. I expect we would have lingered in a state of shock a lot longer than Mary lingered in that state. And I'm not sure we would have believed the promises in faith quite so readily as did Mary because we aren't used to surprises in our lives in faith in these days. We really don't expect them. In fact, many times we don't want to do anything with surprises because surprises can be a lot of work.

With Christmas coming up soon I am reminded of holiday meals with my boy's Uncle Gary. Now Uncle Gary loved eating, but particularly Uncle Gary liked turkey and dressing and mashed potatoes and gravy on the holidays. I grew up and enjoyed the gravy, my grandmother used to make on the holidays. It was made from turkey drippings, pieces of meat, giblets left over in the roaster after the turkey had been taken out but not so Uncle Gary. Uncle Gary when he was with us for dinner made things change because Uncle Gary didn't want all that "stuff" floating around in his gravy. And we knew that when he was going to be there for

dinner when grandmother would say we are having potatoes and gravy for dinner with no surprises in the gravy.

You know there is a real danger in this attitude toward faith. The danger of taking God's grace for granted in our everyday lives. When we stop looking for surprises from God, we underestimate God's generosity toward each one of us and when we assume that we already know what we expect from our lives in faith, we sometimes close ourselves off to power and the presence of God in the world today. Believe me, you and I both know that the nursing homes of America are full of people whose attitude toward life reflects this point of view. Many of our older folks have stopped expecting anything out of life. Something which often happens when we grow older but can happen to us folks who are younger as well and the result of this is a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy. The truth is God specializes in surprising human beings with his love. God's love is always stretched beyond the limits of our human imaginations. And throughout the ages God has reached out to show his love in new and unexpected ways to people and in places which most of us certainly would have chosen if it had been up to us. And the greatest surprise of all came to us in Jesus. No one could have expected that miracle. God had becoming human and God dying and God rising again to reconcile to human beings to God and to each other. Jesus has indeed come into our world and he has not come to reconcile only those who are famous; only those who are powerful but instead to you and me too; regular people like you and like me. Just as the virgin Mary was favored with God's presence; so also, we are favored with God's presence now and forever. What love God choose for us in Jesus doesn't depend upon what we accomplished in our lives of faith but instead it comes to us as a free gift; as a surprise gift from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

This Christmas then there is one surprise you and I can always count upon receiving. It is the peace which comes into our lives as we think and rethink our priorities to make room for the son of God as God enters our hearts and makes them his own. We are expected; we are encouraged to expect that surprise and to rejoice in that surprise because life goes around us even in the modern day. We need those surprises be with us every day. The miracle of God's love comes into our lives in Jesus and we are asked by God to give thanksgiving and gratitude to God as we share that love with others in the things that we do in the coming week. And so anticipate and so be surprised; it is not all that much work and it can be a lot of fun sometimes.

And together we say     AMEN