**Advent at Cairns Road - "Unlikely Invitations"**

The characters involved around the story of Jesus' birth stand out as obvious outsiders that God chose to include. During Advent we will use these characters to consider the Good News:

Nov 27 - Too old ? Zechariah and Elizabeth

Dec 4 - Too insignificant ? Mary and Joseph

Dec 11 - Too marginalised ? The shepherds

Dec 18 - Too late ? Simeon and Anna

Dec 18 - Carol Service using same theme

Week 1. Zechariah and Elizabeth - Too Old?

**Background**.

Luke 1;1-4 and Acts 1;1

What does Luke's introduction to his writings tell you about why he wrote what we now call the books of 'Luke' and 'Acts' in the New Testament?

Hint: Luke is the only gentile writer in the New Testament. He painstakingly records events that other writers do not. He picks out stories that value the poor, the marginalised, the non-religious, women etc and in Acts, the story of how the Gospel spread beyond the people of Israel to the whole world.

Consider: "The Gospel is good news, not good advice, fact not fable"

**Zechariah and Elizabeth**

Luke 1;5-38

How are Zechariah and Elizabeth described in v 6? What does that tell us about them?

What was their disappointment?

How might you expect Zechariah to react to the good news of the Angel's message, eg v 14?

Compare the reactions of Zechariah and Mary to the visitation of the Angel.

Why is it that Zechariah was struck dumb (the word can be translated 'silence' - possibly deaf too - see v 62), yet Mary was not?

Hint: v 29. Mary 'wondered' or 'cast in her mind' - dialogizomai = to reason, muse, deliberate, reckon thoroughly, make an audit. [eg. Mk 9;33 'he asked them, "What were you *discussing* on the way?"' Luke 3;15 'all were *questioning in their hearts* concerning John, whether he might be the Christ'.]

Consider: Doubt can be either:

1. A kind of doubt that is a sign of a closed mind - a defence against answers. Using 'doubt' as a way of staying in control of our lives (or so we think) and keeping our minds closed, or
2. A kind of doubt that is a sign of an open mind. Open to the truth and prepared to relinquish sovereignty over our lives if we can be shown the truth is other than what we thought.

Which are you?

Luke 1;39-45

What was Elizabeth's reaction to these events?

Luke 1;57-66

Zechariah had been 9 months in silence. What might have been going on in his heart and mind?

What was it that brought release? (v63-63). Why?

The name John is derived from the Hebrew name יוֹחָנָן (Yochanan) meaning "YAHWEH is gracious". In a culture where you were expected to name a son after the father's family name, what does this tell us about Zechariah's heart towards God when he named the child?

Luke 1;67-80

Zechariah's prophetic song. Note use of words like redeem, salvation, rescue, forgiveness, peace in this prophetic song.

What does this tell us about Zechariah's own journey over the previous 9 months?

Consider:

"There has never been a gift offered that makes you swallow your pride to the depths that the gift of Jesus Christ requires us to do. Christmas means we are so lost, so unable to save ourselves, that nothing less than the death of the son of God himself could save us. That means you are not somebody who can pull yourself together and live a moral and good life." Timothy Keller

Conclusions

* How will you change the way you respond to what God says - whether you like it or not, or understand it or not?
* Will you accept God's rescue? It is Good News indeed!
* Is there someone you want to hear this Good News over this season, and what can you do about it?