

Fourth Sunday in Advent
December 23, 2018

Text: Luke 1:39-56
Theme: “Lighten”

Heavyweights—heavyweight people are important. So is the assessment by others, by such people themselves, or both. They may be heavyweights in money, like Bezos, Buffet, or Gates. It could be in the sports world in the likes of LeBron, Bryce Harper, or Drew Brees. It may be on the world political scene in the likes of Vladimir Putin, Theresa May, or Donald Trump. We may remember those heavyweights of the past as we did recently with George H. Bush.

Then there are heavy weights, burdens, loads. They weigh quite heavily and can bring one down, loads such as sickness, loneliness, grief, or debt. It could be the load of what is not yet on us, but anticipated. There appears to be a load of challenge in front of us and we are not so sure we are up to it. Then there is crushing load of sin and guilt.

Our theme is lighten us—different than the enlighten of last week. What are we asking in lighten? Are we asking to bring down, I’ve been too high and mighty, so lower me a bit (or a lot)? Yes, but there’s more. Lighten the load, Lord, take away that load of sin and trouble. There is One who does both. They are definitely connected.

“In those days” we read (1:39). In those days there were lightweights and heavyweights. We see two lightweights meeting in a town in the hill country of Judah. One is Elizabeth, the wife of Zechariah the priest. The

other is Mary engaged to be married to Joseph from Nazareth. Elizabeth and Zechariah were two righteous people before the Lord, but they had no children. This was a reproach for Elizabeth. Zechariah had recently had his moment of glory when he had his turn to offer sacrifice in the temple. It turned out to be an unbelievable and frightful experience. The angel Gabriel appeared with the news that Elizabeth would have a child, name him John. He would make ready a people for the Lord. Elizabeth hid herself away for 5 months (1:24). None of the heavyweights of the day noticed. No one was looking for her.

But one does come in the 6th month, her kinswoman, Mary. She appears to be in a hurry to get there, goes in haste. This was quite a journey for a young lady with child herself. She was pledged to marry Joseph who was of the house and line of David. But no one ever supposed he would sit be sitting on David's throne. He was a lightweight from the featherweight town of Nazareth up in Galilee.

It was quite a meeting between these two expectant women. One who had never known man had conceived. The other who had never been able to conceive before and was now definitely beyond years for that sort of thing to happen was now in her sixth month of having conceived. It was all extraordinary this meeting of the ordinary, even miraculous, but no one noticed. Not Herod in Jerusalem, not the chief priest and the teachers of the law. Certainly those two heavyweights named in 2:1,2, Caesar Augustus and Quirinius, Governor of Syria, didn't have a clue.

Yes, Quirinus and Augustus were two real heavyweights. As Governor of Syria Quirinius has Roman legions at his command. They could be deployed throughout his jurisdiction to meet any trouble. If legions were to come to Judea it would be from Syria. Quirinius was well connected to Augustus. At one time he had been the rector (guide) of Gaius Caesar, grandson of Augustus and his intended successor. He must have had the trust of the emperor. And then there was Augustus. In his own day he certainly was a man who needed no introduction and in the right circles that is still true today. By the time of our text Octavius had seen a lot of history, made a lot of history. He was the survivor and victor of a three way competition (other two Marcus Lepidus, and Mark Anthony) for rule. He would have the title Caesar, Emperor, and he would raise the empire to new heights. With him would come the *Pax Romana*, Peace of Rome under which travel and trade flourished. Evidently Caesar was not a heavyweight title enough so to this a word that is weighty was added, Augustus. We remember him every 8th month of the year, that month which comes before the one bearing the name of 7th month.

We could say with these two we had a heavyweight and super heavyweight, even **the** super heavyweight. Those two pregnant women were not on their radar screen no matter the wonder of their pregnancies. And the two tiny weights they carried out of sight of even their mothers were in the imagination of their hearts.

So there are lightweights and heavy weights in these days. We have already mentioned some heavyweights of our day. There are others closer

to home, not as heavy, but whose presence may be overbearing. At least they are heavyweights in their own assessment and carry themselves as such. It may be supervisors, or siblings, or neighbors. They may be over us in some way or not, but they consider themselves somehow exalted above. They like the light, light on them, enjoy lifting up themselves or being lifted by those around. But they may be just a bit top heavy, like this pipe arrangement.

And how are we, heavy or light? We may feel pretty light. We are not much noticed and don't seem to be much consulted. Is there not much to see? At the same time we may feel heavy weighted, weighted down, weighed down with stress and anxiety, and/or sadness. It could pull us right over. And yet there is a bigger load, the load of our sin that does make us top heavy . It is quite a load, a crushing and one magnified in numbers by those around us. It is fallen creatures in competition for exaltation by trying to bring down one another. Each things himself/herself to be the real heavyweight.

The is only One mighty One. Mary sings her praises to Him, "My Soul magnifies the LORD," (v 46), but He needs no magnifying. He has shown strength with His arm. By His mighty hand and outstretched arm He brought Israel out of the house of bondage. The strong arm of Pharaoh was no match. ^{ESV} **Psalm 95:3** For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods. ⁴In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also. ⁵ The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land. As He tells us through Isaiah, I am the

LORD, there is no other god. (Isaiah 45:5). He is the LORD of hosts, the everlasting God.

He makes light work of the heaviest. He has scattered those proud in their own assessment (v 510). He brings down the mighty from their thrones. He reveals heavyweights for the lightweights they are. The big self-assessment with little base to support is quickly toppled.

The Mighty One is the weight inverter. He comes into our world and the result is mighty tiny quaking in our text. As soon as little John hears the voice of Mary from within the womb of his mother, by the Holy Spirit he knows this is more than the voice of Mary, kinswoman of his mother, this is the voice of the mother of the Lord. Yes, the mighty quaking in response to the tinier but much mightier conceived in Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. He will have the throne of his father, David. Of His kingdom there will be no end. The zeal of the Lord will accomplish this (Isaiah 9:7).

“Oh, that God would rend the heavens and come down.” (Isaiah 64:1), “O Come, O Come, Immanuel.” And He does, but not in a heaven rending way, not this time. He comes without a blaze of glory, other than the announcement of His birth by the angels. He comes conceived by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary. No one knows of the coming at this point save Mary, and Elizabeth, John, and soon to find out (if he doesn’t know already), Joseph. He is not the talk of the nation or even of this town in Judah. But Elizabeth and the child within her know.

There will be a heavy weight on the Light. It will be the whole load of sin upon the One who tips the sin scales at zero. Cast all your care on Him for He cares for you. How do you know? Because He took the whole load of your sin, bore them willingly. Mary makes the journey that His journey may continue. He goes back to the lightweight town of Nazareth, and then with Joseph down to that little town of Bethlehem at the decree of the heavyweight Augustus, the high and mighty one who did not realize He was doing the bidding of the Almighty One through what he thought was a way to collect more tax revenue. The weight that would sink us into the depths of hell He took upon Himself. We are sanctified through the offering of His body at the cross(Hebrews 10:10).

Our weight of condemnation has been removed through the crucified, but now risen and reigning One. We are washed clean, those now swaddled in His righteousness and taken up in the arms of our Father who says, “my child.” He has helped His servant Israel in remembrance of His mercy (1:54). He has scattered the proud and brought down the mighty, and exalted the lowly. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are filled with good things. Our sins are forgiven and we are established on the solid foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus being the cornerstone. It is on Him we stand. It is by His strength we bear our burdens.

It is from sorrow to joy! Mary is just beaming! She is going to have a baby and not just any baby, this will be the Son of the Most High! She

doesn't know all the details but she has a lot on which to ponder. She is lifted up as she ponders in her humility.

We have reason to rejoice, to beam! I realize last week was Gaudete Sunday, but surely some can carry over to today! We are sons of God. The gates of a blessed eternity have been opened up to us! We live lives of service now knowing and relating what great things God has done for us. We do that great thing, the wonderful thing, of humble service for Him. We are lightweights whose heavy load has been lifted that we might carry the heavyweight message of life. For Jesus' sake. Amen