

## HOPE VISIONING 3

Dec. 14-20, 2025

### Values: Joy and Belonging

**Quote:** From sermon (1514) by Martin Luther on the tax collector Zaccheus who climbed a tree to see Jesus, and reacted with joy:

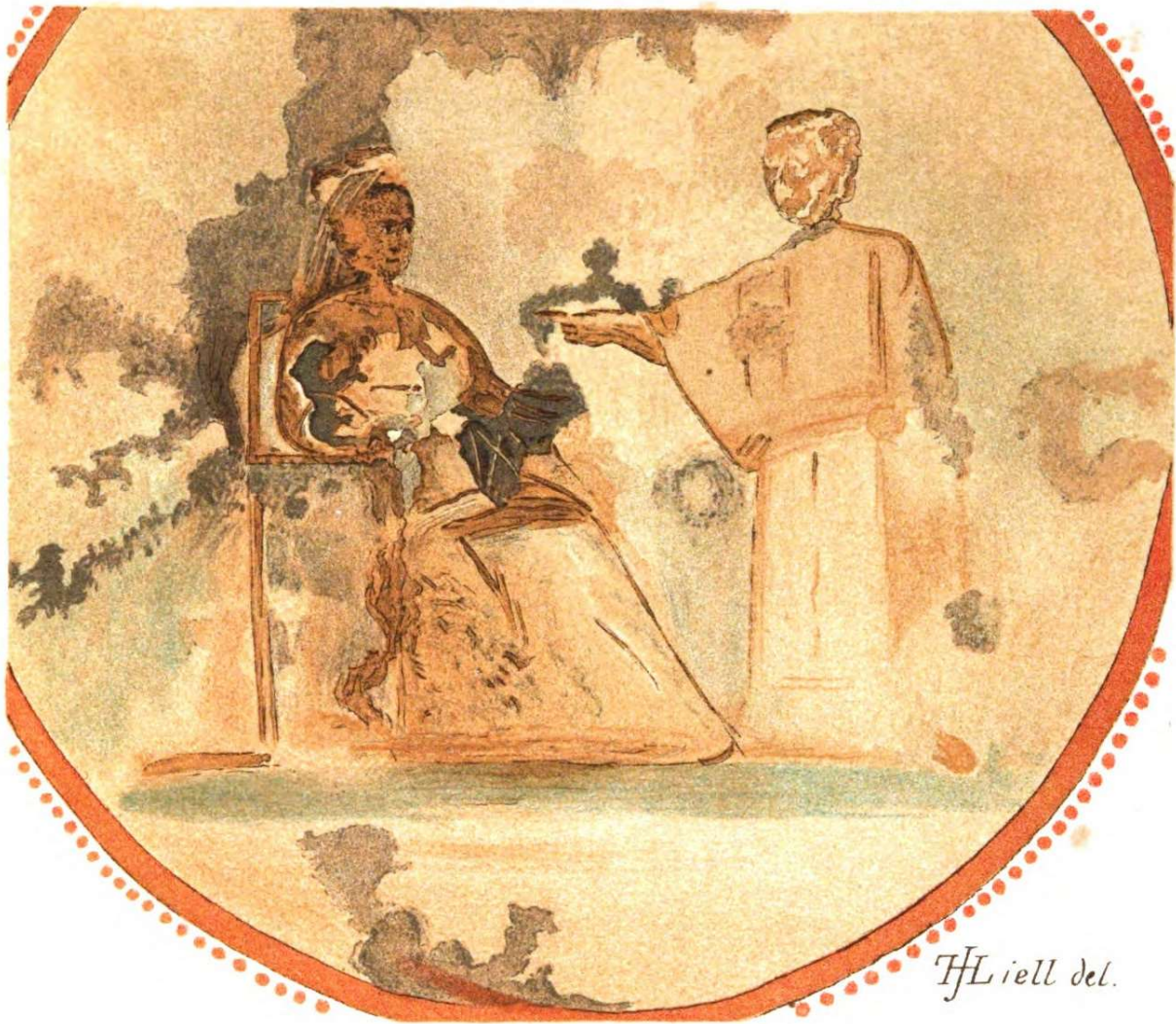
“After all, he [Zaccheus] did not have anything to boast of before Christ who was coming, and he knew that he is not worthy compared to other people. That he nevertheless longed for Christ is apparent because he received him with joy. Joy is a sign of preceding love and longing.”

Op. cit. Miika E. Antila, *Luther's Theology of Music: Spiritual Beauty and Pleasure*, 2013, 143.

**Song:** The Magnificat, Mary's song of praise upon learning that she would give birth to Jesus

Luke 1: 46-55, New Revised Standard Version

46 And Mary said,  
“My soul magnifies the Lord,  
47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,  
48 for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.  
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;  
49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.  
50 His mercy is for those who fear him  
from generation to generation.  
51 He has shown strength with his arm;  
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.  
52 He has brought down the powerful from their thrones  
and lifted up the lowly;  
53 He has filled the hungry with good things,  
and sent the rich away empty.  
54 He has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy.  
55 according to the promise he made to our ancestors,  
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”



The Annunciation in an ancient Roman fresco, 3d century AD

By anonymous artist, reproduction by H. F. Jos Liell -

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**Reading:** The Annunciation and Mary's Visit to Elizabeth

Luke 1: 26-45, New Revised Standard Version

26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, 27 to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. 28 And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." 29 But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of

greeting this might be. 30 The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor in with God. 31 And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. 32 He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. 33 He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” 34 Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” 35 The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called the Son of God. 36 And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God.” 38 Then Mary said, “Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

39 In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, 40 where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit 42 and exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. 43 And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? 44 For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. 45 And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.”

**Questions** after reading for plot and paying attention to the feelings that might stir in you:

1. Imagine Mary’s feelings when the angel Gabriel announces her pregnancy to her. What might she fear? How would she be seen by society around her? How would she imagine her pregnancy affecting her belonging in her community?
2. Mary goes “with haste” to visit Elizabeth. What is she seeking in her visit to the older woman? What does Mary’s desire to see Elizabeth tell us about the need for belonging? How does Elizabeth receive the young woman? How is this encounter an example of the value of spirit-led belonging?
3. Zaccheus, mentioned by Luther as an example of joy, was a tax collector despised by all (and not belonging to the community), and yet he receives Jesus with great joy. According to tradition (thanks for sharing this, Pastor Greg), Zaccheus became the 12<sup>th</sup> disciple replacing Judas Iscariot, and took the name Matthias. What do the stories of Zaccheus, Mary, and Elizabeth reveal to us about joy and belonging?
4. How do we express joy in our individual faith lives? In the life of our congregation? How is joy different from happiness? How is joy linked to belonging?