Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

I have a one year old granddaughter who already knows how to swipe from one photo to the next on a mobile phone. And when we were down in Christchurch a couple of weeks ago, she came across the TV remote on the couch and she pressed the buttons and then turned around and looked at the TV. So she already knows that the remote does something to the big black thing on the wall! Now, I also know a 65 year old man who has never owned a cell phone. And I have had a Skype call with him but his wife had to answer the call; he has zero interest in and understanding of technology. And we probably all know an older person or two who does not like technology. But it can work the other way also; for example, many old people, like myself, love classical music and pipe organs and prog rock, but many young people just don’t see the beauty and skill in those sorts of music or instruments. So it is often the case that with any given thing there can be a variety of responses from one age group to another.

Well, summarizing the Christian life, the Cadet Hymn says, “Living for Jesus a life that is true, striving to please Him in all that I do.” But is this true for all ages? I mean, some people say that young children should not be indoctrinated, which means to have Christian teaching ‘forced’ on them. So you just let them grow up and make their own choices. Is that true? And some people say that the time of youth is a time to enjoy yourself and have fun, and you can get serious about Jesus when you are old. Is that right? And others say that it is understandable for younger people to be all fired up about serving the Lord, but when you get old you can relax and step aside from actively serving in the church. Is that biblical? In other words, do all ages have to live for Jesus and strive to please Him in all that they do?

Well, as we continue our short Advent series, Mary has learned from the angel that she is newly pregnant with the Lord Jesus. And the angel told her that her relative, Elizabeth, was six months pregnant with John the Baptist. So we can well understand that Mary was keen to visit Elizabeth so that they could share their incredible situations together. And beginning with Mary’s arrival at Elizabeth’s home, we have a record of people of varying ages, from an unborn infant right through to a very old couple, responding to the very first Christmas. And as we consider how all ages responded to the first Christmas, we will see that **the right response of all ages to Jesus Christ is faith and obedience**.

1. And the first response we will look at is the response of **John the Baptist**. And as we just noted, Elizabeth was six-months pregnant, so John was an unborn infant, inside his mother’s tummy!
   1. And John’s response to Jesus is described in **verses 41& 43**. For when pregnant Mary arrived at Elizabeth’s house and greeted her, we read that “*the baby leaped in [Elizabeth’s] womb*,” and in verse 43 she said, “*The baby in my womb* ***leaped for joy***.”
      1. Now, I am sure that many of us have either experienced or seen a baby moving in a mother’s tummy. It is an amazing thing to see. But this was not some random in-utero movement, as Elizabeth makes clear; this was her unborn son leaping for joy in the presence of His Saviour!
      2. If it had been possible for Elizabeth to have an **ultrasound scan** at that moment, there would have been an image not of the usual resting baby with a beating heart on display, which is amazing in itself, but a dancing baby that leaped for joy!
      3. One commentator explains it this way, “The statement concerns an operation of the Holy Spirit which caused Elizabeth’s child to feel, experience, and know that the … Lord … was present here and now, and which caused that child to leap forward toward the Lord with a dance of joyful jubilation.”
   2. Now congregation, before we do anything else, this is something we should simply marvel at. How amazing that the Spirit of God was at work in John in this way even while he was in the womb! But our general point here is that we must not think that the very young are not able to believe in Jesus and obey His commandments.
      1. And quite obviously, the only thing we can do with unborn babies is to pray that the Holy Spirit would be at work in them already in a saving way. The Bible is clear that we begin life as those who are dead in trespasses and sins. That is the starting and natural condition of everyone. So the Holy Spirit must first make us alive or cause us to be born again before we will live for Jesus. And John’s response to Jesus reveals that this can happen already within the womb! So parents, pray for the Spirit to begin His work already in your unborn children.
      2. But in terms of very young children, writing to Timothy in **2 Timothy 3:14-15**, Paul said, “*But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus*.” So from earliest childhood, Timothy had been taught by his mother and grandmother to trust in the Lord Jesus for salvation.
      3. And this is why in our forms for the baptism of the children of believers, we say that “we [parents] are to teach our little ones that they have been set apart to God and are to live for Him … to put our trust for life and death in Jesus Christ our Saviour, deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him in obedience and love.”
      4. So parents, from their earliest days, teach your children to trust in Jesus Christ. Teach them to confess their sins and believe that Jesus died for the forgiveness of their sins. And teach them to strive to please Him in all that they do. For example, in **Colossians 3:20** and **Ephesians 6:1**, Paul says to children, “*Obey your parents in the Lord*,” and “*Obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord*.”
      5. So children, have you put your trust in Jesus Christ as your Saviour? Are you striving to please your Lord in all that you do, like obeying your parents in everything, for example?
2. So even from the response of unborn baby John to the Lord Jesus and the other passages we mentioned, we see that the right response of ***young children*** to Jesus Christ is faith and obedience. But next we turn our attention to the youth as we consider **Mary**. For it is generally believed that Mary was around 15 years old at this time.
   1. And what we need to appreciate is that what was happening to Mary here was the most important moment in history! Do you understand that? **Galatians 4:4** puts it like this: “*But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman*.” God’s plan of salvation required the death and resurrection of one who was fully God and fully human. And that one was Jesus. And now, the moment of His arrival on earth had come. In movie soundtracks, they often have some piece of music that builds up to a mighty crescendo when the key moment of the film happens. Well, the Old Testament is like a piece of music that slowly builds up until this key moment – the promised Messiah has arrived!
   2. And all of all the human women that have ever existed, this somewhere around 15 years old youth named Mary was the one chosen by God to carry and give birth to Messiah. So who was Mary? Who was she as a person?
      1. Well, she was an **absolute nobody**. She was not in any way famous. She even came from Nazareth in Galilee, perhaps the most despised and unremarkable city in all Israel.
         1. But this is so typical of God’s plan of salvation, isn’t it. Again and again in the Bible we see God doing extraordinary things with nobodies! The genealogy of Jesus is the perfect example; yes, there is a King David in there, but there is also Rahab the prostitute, Ruth the Moabitess, and who knows anything about Nahshon, Azor, Matthan.
         2. And I hope I am not offending anyone here today when I say that this is good news because we are a room full of nobodies. But look what God can do with nobodies! Young people, whenever you feel invisible or average or ordinary, remember that God has done amazing things with nobodies who were prepared to live for Jesus!
      2. But Mary was not just a nobody; she was also a 15 year old **youth**! And what can you say about the youth? Isn’t youth just a sort of in-between phase of life that has to be endured until adulthood!? Apparently not! For youthful Mary was chosen by God to be the mother of the Lord Jesus! And notice what it says in verse 30: “*For you have found favour with God*.” And it soon becomes clear why Mary found favour with God:
         1. Look at her response to the incredible news that she was pregnant by the Holy Spirit and expecting the Messiah in verse 38: “*Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word*.” And then we get Mary’s beautiful song of praise in verses 46-55.
         2. So youthful Mary’s respond to the first Christmas was? Faith and obedience! She believed what the angel told her. And even though Mary still had a lot to learn about how her son would become her Saviour, it is clear from her song that she believed that He was the Messiah. And she agreed to do what the Lord had called her to do.
   3. In **Ecclesiastes 12:1**, we read, “*Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before [old age comes]*.” And to Timothy who was a very young minister, Paul said, “*Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity*.” Young people, is this how you are responding to Christ? Have you received Christ and believed in His name for the forgiveness of your sins? Are you preparing yourself for baptism or profession of faith if you have already been baptized? And are you striving to live in such a way that your speech and behaviour and love and faith and purity are an example to others? This is what the Lord calls you to, as youth.
3. So the right response of youths to Jesus Christ is faith and obedience. So thirdly and finally, let’s look now at the response of **the adults**, as we consider how Elizabeth and Zechariah responded to the Christ of Christmas. And we are told back in verse 7 that Elizabeth and Zechariah were both “*advanced in years*.” So they were ‘seniors’!
   1. And if you know the story of the angel’s appearance to **Zechariah**, you will remember that Zechariah’s first response to the Christ of Christmas was not so good. When he heard that he and his elderly wife were going to have a son, Zechariah probably analysed these words with what he had learned in biology class at school and concluded that this was not possible. And so, for his lack of faith, Zechariah was unable to speak until John’s birth.
   2. But the focus then moves to **Elizabeth**. And back in verse 25 we see that she thanked the Lord for her miraculous pregnancy: “*Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when He looked on me*.” And then if we skip ahead to verse 43, when Mary arrived, she said, “*Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?*”
      1. So, Elizabeth responded to the Christ of Christmas with faith and obedience! She believed that the baby within Mary was her Lord! I am sure that she must have had 100 questions in her heart. But by God’s grace, she believed that Mary’s child was her promised Messiah.
      2. And notice also that there was **no jealousy** in Elizabeth. There is no sense here of “Hrumph! How come I only get the messenger and she gets the Messiah!’ Instead she is content with her situation and glad to celebrate the honour that Mary has received.
   3. And then, after John was born, the focus moved back to **Zechariah**. And now we see him also responding with faith and obedience.
      1. We see his faith in verses 68-70. For there Zechariah praises God for redeeming His people and raising up a horn of salvation in the house of David. For this is Old Testament Messiah prophecy language. Zechariah now understand and believes that God has fulfilled His promise to bring Messiah. And down in verse 77, Zechariah connects Messiah with the forgiveness of sins. So this song is Zechariah’s public profession of faith.
      2. And if you remember the account of the angel’s visit to Zechariah, he told him to name his son John. But when the baby was born, everyone else was set to call the baby Zechariah, following the usual custom of naming the son after the father. And I still remember hearing that my grandson had been named after me. What a huge honour! But Zechariah chose obedience over honour, and said, “*His name is John*.” SO Zechariah is another example of faith and obedience.
   4. And just over the page we will meet **Anna** in chapter 2 of Luke’s Gospel. And Anna was either 84 years old or had been a widow for 84 years! And what does this very old woman do with her time? We read, “*She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day*.” And when she saw Jesus at the temple, we read, “*Coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of Him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem*.” What an example of faith and obedience!
   5. So how should adults, including seniors, respond to Christ? With faith and obedience. Adults/seniors – Have you received and believed in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins? And our world makes much of **retirement**; when you reach a certain age and you can stop working and put your feet up and enjoy yourself. And maybe, financially, some of you do not need a day job to pay the bills. That is fine. But the Bible makes no allowance for retirement in terms of our obedience. And Zechariah and Elizabeth and Anna are examples of seniors who were still actively serving the Lord in old age. Is that how it is with you?

The message of Christmas is that Jesus has come to be the Saviour that we sinners need. So whether we are young children, youth, adults, or seniors, the right response to Jesus is faith and obedience. So are you “*living for Jesus a life that is true, striving to please Him in all that [you] do*”? May this be so of each and every one of us. Amen.