

Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> December, 2018  
The Fourth Sunday of Advent - Year C

Micah 5:2-5a  
Psalm - Song of Mary  
Hebrews 10:5-10  
Luke 1:39-45

**In the name of the Trinity; Creator, Redeemer, and Life-Giver...**

Today we reach the conclusion of the season of Advent - the fourth Sunday; the candle of love is lit, and we cast our eyes forward to the manger. And, some might say, we reach the pinnacle of our Advent message, in the events of the Mary, the Mother of our Lord; her meeting with Elizabeth, and the great words of praise we used for our psalm, which we know as the Magnificat, or Song of Praise.

“My soul magnifies the Lord,” Mary sings. Here is a girl who is unmarried and impoverished, and who has recently been visited by an angel with a very peculiar message. “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 Son of God.” Mary had every reason to run screaming from this angel, every cause to consider him an Angel of Darkness, not a messenger of the Lord.

For having a child out of wedlock, she could be stoned for adultery. At the very least, she could be rejected by Joseph, her parents, her village. She could spend the rest of her days in even deeper poverty, struggling to keep herself and her child fed outside the safety of a marriage and community. But she doesn't reject God's ridiculous plan to inhabit her womb. She hurries to see her cousin Elizabeth and breaks into song: “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.”

This great hymn of praise has empowered the oppressed and unnerved oppressors for millennia. Mary, who knows our Creator so intimately she carries the Son of God, sings of a God who reaches down and touches the pain of the people.

This God lifts up the victims of economic poverty and political violence and draws them into gentle arms, the way a mother hen gathers her chicks beneath her wings. And this God sends the proud packing. The powerful and corrupt kings who are fluent in the ways of violence and domination are deposed. The rich, who have hoarded the stuff of Creation for their own purposes, are sent away with nothing to show for their greed.

But is this what we believe? And if so, is this how we live? If we are honest with ourselves, we will answer “no”. Or perhaps “not often enough!” And maybe that’s hardly surprising, when you consider the enormity of what it is we proclaim at this time. As Christians, we believe in a divine incarnation—that God took human form in the person of Jesus. What’s more, we believe that a young virgin in a town in Israel carried this Son of God to term.

In these Advent weeks, we prepare to hear the wild and glorious story again: that the King of Kings and Lord of Lords made himself at home in swaddling clothes in a manger. And this baby King’s mother tells us what the incarnation means: things are going to change. Oppression will give way to justice. Tears will flow into rivers of laughter. The high and mighty will be humbled, and a poor, unmarried mother will give birth to a Saviour.

At the time that Mary sings her revolutionary anthem, though, nothing has yet changed on the surface, for God’s time is not akin to our own. She claims that God has brought down the powerful from their thrones—but the Roman Empire continues to dominate the Israelites in their own land. She professes that God has filled the hungry with good things—but famine still plagues the peoples of the earth. How can Mary’s very soul be bursting with glimmering joy when there is so much reason to tremble with fear and quake with sorrow?

It’s irresponsible. It makes no sense. And yet every word of Mary’s delirious rejoicing is true. The magnification of God that emanates from Mary’s soul, that jeweled core of each human, is deeply, radically, eternally truthful.

The joy of Christmas is all about trusting God's promise to redeem creation, and Mary's song reveals the ultimate meaning of the incarnation that is growing within her. With the birth of this child the course of human history is transformed, altered drastically for the better.

Things are not right—this much we are sure of. We believe that God created the world to be a garden of praise and life, not a den of pain and death. It isn't right that bodies deteriorate and die. Women shouldn't be widowed. Young people shouldn't be killed in senseless car accidents. Neighborhoods shouldn't be ruled by guns. Buildings shouldn't be felled by terrorists.

Nations shouldn't quarrel with bombs. Women should not lose be abused and murdered by their domestic partners. Lakes shouldn't be polluted by toxins. But God is moving, and a pregnant young girl bears witness to the glory at hand. A beautiful change is growing, and the final triumph of life over death is inevitable.

Centuries before Mary revealed the great works of the Mighty One in her bold canticle, the prophet Isaiah issued a divine clarion call: "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion-- to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit." (NRSV)

In Isaiah's words, we find the same unabated rejoicing in the work of our God. Now, we have the fact of oppression, the excruciating pain of broken hearts; Isaiah declares the advent of good news and the binding up of wounds. Now, we have captives and prisoners — but Isaiah affirms that all persons unjustly jailed shall be liberated. Now, there is talk of God's anger with creation, but Isaiah announces that the year of the Lord's favor is at hand.

Now, men and women are racked with tears of mourning—Isaiah prophesies that they shall be adorned with garments of celebration. Now, we are faint with fear and despair, but Isaiah proclaims that we shall be reborn under the happy weight of the mantle of praise.

The child developing within Mary, who causes John the Baptist to jump for joy within his mother's womb, this child will grow into a King whose reign is everlasting. And the words he will use to illuminate his holy mission at the beginning of his ministry in the Gospel of Luke are these words of Isaiah. He is the anointed one. He has been sent to bring good news; indeed, he *is* the good news. Everything is going to change, all because God is enfolded into a human being.

The same spirit of God that came upon Isaiah and overshadowed Mary still moves among us today. The light is bright now, even though we are still living in the darkness. And even now we rejoice, for through the lens of the Magnificat, everything looks very different. Let us join our souls with Mary's to magnify the Lord. Let us be confident, friends, and proclaim: The Son of God is on the way!

The Lord be with you.