

Advent 4 C – 12/22/2024

In our gospel lesson today, we have Mary's song of praise and gratitude, which has been given the title, The Magnificat. My soul proclaims your greatness O God, and my spirit rejoices in you my Savior. The Message, a paraphrase of the Bible, puts it this way, Mary says "I'm bursting with good news; I'm dancing the song of my Savior, God took one look at me, and look what happened- I'm the most fortunate woman on earth!"

Now really, she is not even technically a woman. She's a pregnant teenager and unmarried. She has run off into the country to her cousin Elizabeth's. Elizabeth is much older and also pregnant. Where is the good news?

Mary must have had some fear. An angel, Gabriel had come to visit her to tell her that she would be the mother of the Savior of the world, which as a Jewish woman, would mean the messiah. Who would believe her? What were people going to say when they saw her, a pregnant, unmarried teenager carrying a baby? That must have been the reason that she ran off into the country to her cousin's to stay at least three months.

She would be a disgrace to her family, even though she had done nothing to get pregnant. Mary probably didn't know what Joseph would do, as any other man who would be engaged and his fiancé became pregnant would normally want to disown her. Even going back after three months with Elizabeth, she had no idea how or who would receive her.

Yet, despite all the shame, hardship and possibly death that she may encounter, here she is praising God. Mary can't contain herself and it causes her to burst forth in song, singing the good news. She is looking at this as a gift from God. God has set her apart, yet no church leader would have done this. Culture would not tolerate this.

Is it God that doesn't get it, or is it human beings that really don't understand God. God seems to enjoy role reversals and surprising us with the unexpected. It doesn't always make us feel comfortable. It shifts where power and control are placed by God, and we want to fight it.

First of all, here is a woman basically elevated above men. She is being given a role in our Christian faith that no man can hold. God has given her the mission to be the mother of God's son, our Savior, the Messiah, as Christians understand him. We could easily say that of course she is carrying the baby as God didn't create men to do this.

Although, God could have picked a woman of nobility, but God did not. Mary was probably seen as the least of all people by society, yet for God this was the person chosen to carry out this mission. In this song of gratitude, we also find prophecy of what kind of Messiah and Savior her son, Jesus would be.

Did you hear when I read it that on one hand God has already done these things and yet I believe it is giving us hope that God will continue to do these things. Mary is describing that Jesus will continue to do the work and model what God wants.

God has been bringing down the powerful from their thrones, and lifting up the lowly; God has filled the hungry with good things, and sending the rich away empty. God has come to the aid of Israel, God's servant, remembering that God is merciful as God had promised Abraham and to his descendants forever.

God's kingdom is forever in reform of bringing all people back in line. We are all made differently, and this is to be celebrated. Although not all people celebrate this, and it makes them feel uncomfortable and out of control. What God continues to do in God's way is to bring everyone back to how God views people and that is, all people are gifted by God and important for life in the community.

I don't believe that God sets up a hierarchy in a few people. No one has all the answers, but collectively a community can produce the best options and then make choices. I don't believe that God puts certain people in power to control others. Yet some people have less money than others, but that doesn't mean that they should be treated differently than others who have more money.

We are reminded by Mary and Elizabeth today that it doesn't make any difference to God about age or gender who is called to do God's work. Even in our Old Testament lesson from Micah, we are reminded that God did not choose a major city and palace for Jesus to be born in. Bethlehem was as The Message puts it, the runt of the litter. Jesus was born in a stable in the hay.

The Message goes on to say, from Bethlehem will come the leader who will shepherd-rule Israel. He'll be no upstart, no pretender. His family tree is ancient and distinguished. David was a shepherd who was born in Bethlehem.

If God doesn't see what God wants to see in our country today, these things prophesied by Mary will continue to happen. God can work through anyone to bring these things into action. But history tells us that God does not always work through those in high places.

In order for human beings to see something different, God shakes it up and works through those who culture does not like to recognize as capable people. As people of God, we are called to listen and watch when people are being oppressed, when people are hungry and need care. We will be called to address these issues and thankfully we are doing some of that already. But there may be more coming where we will be called to take a stand. This is how we will continue to do God's work modeled by Jesus.

Today our model for faith is Mary who is able to embrace her mission to be the mother of Jesus amidst all of the unknowns. She is willing to put her trust in God. We have some idea of what she encountered in this role given to her by God to be the Messiah's mother. God kept her safe as well as having the support of Joseph. This is the good news that God is always with God's people.

Are we able to sing with our whole heart in gratitude for God calling us to be followers of Jesus? We can be called by God to any role, and we can resist or with faith embrace whatever God is calling us to do. Remember the good news is that God continues to be with us. Jesus walks beside us through all of the unknowns in our life.

May we sing this good news in our life shown by the way in which we connect with our neighbor!

Let us pray, God who brings good news to us in so many ways, May your Holy Spirit help us to respond to your call in faith as Mary did. Mary was the least of all people who others thought would be called to this role. We know that you are calling each one of us to serve you. Help us to serve you in joy that others may hear and see the good news in us. In Jesus' name, Amen

