

ADVENT 3 – JOY SUNDAY DECEMBER 11th 2016

Mary Expectant Mother

Prayer: O Mighty One, we rejoice this day as we remember Mary. You chose Mary to bring Good News to the world. As we listen to Mary's song, may our hearts be lifted and our minds be inspired with Your message for us today. We rejoice that you invite all of us to join with Mary in proclaiming the Good News. We pray as followers of Jesus Christ. Amen

Imagine Mary and Elizabeth, sitting with a cup of hot tea, sharing their excitement about being pregnant. Such unexpected surprises in their lives, at their age! Mary was very excited about being the mother of the promised Messiah and she shared her joy! If you have children and grand-children or a niece or nephew, you know the excitement of an anticipated birth!

Every Christmas we can experience the excitement of this baby, the promised child of God, coming into the world. Mary knew this was going to be an exceptional child, the Son of God. She accepted the risk and responsibility. Mary knew she was pregnant with possibilities for changing the world. She had been lifted from the lowly state of servant hood. She knew that others would be lifted up, and the powerful would be brought down from their thrones. A reversal of fortunes as the powerful and rich exchange places with the powerless and poor. God's choice of Mary is an example of this reversal of fortunes. God chose Mary, a young woman in the small town of Nazareth, to be the mother of the promised Messiah

All too often we get hooked by the visit from the Angel Gabriel telling Mary she would be "with child". We shake our heads, get real--- that is not how it happens. Would you have found another way to create the excitement and awe of God's Son coming into the world? Of course there is a lot of storytelling here, and wild imagination. The scenes we see depicted on Christmas cards and manger scenes tug at the heart strings. Of course the story was written long after Jesus died and the writers were challenged to create something that would catch the imagination and stress the importance of the birth.

According to Luke, the Angel Gabriel approached Mary with words of great honour:

"Hail Mary full of Grace"

It's Mary's grace that has attracted God's attention. What is this grace? It is what Luke shows us in her conversation and her actions – courage, boldness, grit, ringing convictions about justice. Not submissive weakness, Grace is not submissive and the power of God is never weak.

Today we heard the familiar words of the Magnificat. A song of praise that seems to be based on Hannah's song in 2nd Samuel, and several other Old Testament passages. These passages remind readers that God comes to help the poor and oppressed, not the rich and powerful. Also it affirms again that Israel is God's favoured one. Maybe it was Luke's knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures that chose these words to put into Mary's song.

BUT What if Mary knew the Hebrew Scriptures as well as Luke! Maybe she memorized Hannah's song and knew it in her heart. Mary may have been expecting the Messiah like all other believers and now she really was expecting the Messiah.

Mary was excited – God chose her!

‘My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.

Mary praises God for what God has done and will do in the future:

His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.’

If you haven't already liberated Mary, think about these words from Nancy Rockwell in an article called [No More Lying About Mary](#). Thanks to MJ for another sermon inspiration.

We must look past the meek, mild and mindless model of Mary that has disempowered women over the centuries.

Mary was an intelligent woman who mothered God's redemption of the human world. She is determined, not domestic, free, not foolish, holy, not helpless, strong not submissive, She beckons women everywhere to speak out for God's justice to be born into this world. There is still work to be done to feed the hungry and lift up the poor in our society.

Maybe you've asked the same question we heard in the Gospel reading today, when John asked if Jesus really is the Messiah they were waiting for.

Jesus says look at the evidence:

The blind receive their sight

The people who walk in a great darkness, a darkness of Spirit, are finally able to see the light of life through Jesus the Christ.

The lame walk and the lepers are cleansed

People who face health crises can be assured that Christ's healing and sustaining presence is with them. Often it is not a physical disability that handicaps us but an emotional problem that becomes a barrier to being fully healthy. Christ's liberating love and acceptance can strengthen us.

The deaf hear

Often our minds are closed to hearing the Good News messages in scripture, even as we hear this story of Mary and how it relates to liberating women. We still have oppression and discrimination in our society. DO we hear the cries for inclusivity and compassion? Do we ignore the opportunities we have to respond, to make changes in our attitudes towards others?

The poor have good news brought to them

Fortunately the poor do receive some good news this time of year. Hamperville gathered lots of food for the Loaves and Fishes Food-bank. 3,000 people were fed at the Union Gospel Mission in Vancouver last night. There will be other dinners for the less fortunate in this community too. (A dinner we take for granted every night!) I am amazed at the public response for food, money and the outpouring of charity for the disadvantaged in our community in the Christmas season. We know that the secular bells of money, spend more money, ring louder than the Church bells. Somehow people get the Jesus message to care for our neighbours and strangers, even if they don't give Jesus the recognition. This is a time of generosity and we see glimpses of the goodness God wants for the whole world all the time.

Yes, Mary gave birth to the Messiah. Jesus the Messiah shows us the way to lift up the lowly and feed the hungry. We have a choice to respond and share all of this good news.

Mary was a joy-filled expectant mother. She was pregnant with possibilities and promises for the future.

Here we are pregnant with possibilities for new life in this community of faith.
Let's celebrate with joy in our hearts.

Christmas comes every year, giving us the opportunity to experience the joy and excitement of the coming Christ.

Are we ready to feel the joy that Mary expected?

Are we ready to make room for Christ to be born in our lives again?