

Advent III B 2011

Texts: Isaiah 61: 1-4, 8-11

Canticle 15-The Magnificat

1 Thessalonians 5: 16-24

John 1:6-8, 19-28

“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior”
Luke 1:46

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be always acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer. Amen.

In place of this morning’s psalm, we actually read a portion of Luke. What was read was the Magnificat, Mary’s song of praise to God at the time of her visit to her cousin Elizabeth. Mary goes to visit Elizabeth immediately after the angel Gabriel has told her that she would bear God’s son and name him Jesus.

Elizabeth is pregnant with John—a pregnancy that Elizabeth never thought she would see and one that came about well past her childbearing years. Her childlessness was a shame she bore in her community. Children were considered a blessing and lack of them was a sign that somehow at sometime, one had sinned against God. Whereas her lack of having a child was a disgrace, Elizabeth’s pregnancy in her advanced age was an embarrassment.

But then along comes Mary, Elizabeth’s young cousin from Nazareth. Mary is also pregnant but she is not married, which at that time was considered socially scandalous and shameful. Mary ran the risk of being put out of her community and her family.

Yet despite the timing and circumstances surrounding the pregnancies, these women come together in joy and rejoice at what God was doing through them. Mary comes into Elizabeth’s house and greets her and at the very sound of her voice, Elizabeth’s unborn son leaps for joy in Elizabeth’s womb.

Mary then proclaims, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. From this day all generations shall call me

blested; the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.”

I’ve been thinking a lot about Mary in the last couple of weeks. I’ve been thinking about the courage this young girl showed in what was surprising and difficult circumstances. It takes courage to be used by God as God wants, and not as we want. It takes courage to take God at God’s word and to trust that what is foretold to us will indeed take place. It takes courage to let God’s plan unfold and to agree to be a part of it.

Mary was not browbeaten into carrying God’s son. Mary was chosen but Mary also said “yes” to God’s asking and her “yes” was essential to God’s plan being carried out. Mary agreed to be a part of God’s plan, and in agreeing to be a part of it, she shows us a way to be a part of God’s plan too.

I think it is a safe thing to say that Mary was transformed from her decision to let God use her. Mary’s life was never the same after she said “yes” to God. She knew hardship and pain. She knew that the child she bore had her blood flowing through his veins, but that he didn’t truly belong to her. She knew that she was being asked to give him up and that he belonged to God long before he belonged to her.

Mary’s life was transformed by carrying God inside her, and it is the same with us. When we agree to be part of God’s plan, when we say yes to carrying God inside us and to allow him to grow there, we are never the same either.

The miracle and message of Advent is that we are all given the opportunity to be Mary. We are all chosen to be the blessed God bearer to the world. God will not force this on us, but we are invited into this role and it is up to us to decide whether or not we will say “yes” to God’s offer.

To grow God in us is hard work. Transformation is never easy and is often painful. Giving birth to something new and different is fraught with perils and problems and is unpredictable. I would bet my collar that Mary, even after she said “yes” to God, had questions and concerns and didn’t know exactly what was going to happen.

But Mary also trusted in God enough to let God take care of her questions and concerns. And so it should be with us as well.

We do not have a God of quick fixes, we have a God who is a midwife, a God who is beside us in the often scary birth process, a God who in the height of our pain and uncertainty will get us to refocus and concentrate on the work we are to do.

Advent is the season of pregnant possibilities. It is the holy time of waiting-not just us waiting for God to come again, but also God waiting on us, waiting for us to answer his invitation as to whether we will participate in birthing His Word into the world.

What will that look like? I don't know. I do know that we are being asked to enter into a time of deep discernment and waiting. I do know that we, this community of St. Matthew's, is being asked to enter into a birthing process of something new and different and I know that it will be God who will be directing that birth. I also know that it will be hard but that it will also be holy.

We will have times that are painful and uncertain and we will bring our questions and concerns to God. But I also know that, like Mary, we are being chosen for something, we are being chosen for something bigger than ourselves that involves each one of us.

Will we, like Mary, open the womb of our hearts and say "yes" to God?

I hope so, dear friends; I hope so. It is only in doing so that we will be able to sing out, "Our soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and our spirit rejoices in God our Savior; for he has looked with favor on his lowly servants. From this day all generations will call us blessed: the Almighty has done great things for us and holy is his name."

Amen.

