December 23, 2018

Luke 1:39-45

Hope is on the Way

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Luke 1:39-45 New Revised Standard Version

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.”

There was a 5th grade class that was putting on a Christmas play and there was the bit about Mary and Joseph coming to the inn. There was one boy who wanted to be Joseph, but when the parts were handed out his biggest rival got the part of Joseph and he was the inn keeper. He was really bitter about this, so during all the rehearsals he began to plot how to get even with his rival. The night of the performance Mary and Joseph came walking across the stage. They knocked on the door of the inn, and the innkeeper opened the door and asked them gruffly what they wanted. Joseph answered, “We’d like to have a room for the night.” Suddenly the inn-keeper threw the door wide open and said, "Great, come on in and I’ll give you the best room in the house." Now, that wasn’t in the script and for a few seconds Joseph didn’t know what to do.  After a few minutes of awkward silence, Joseph stepped up to the innkeeper, and looked through the door into the inn. Joseph turned around to Mary and said, “No wife of mine is going to stay in a dump like this. Come on, Mary, let’s go to the barn.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

In our scripture today we hear the Christmas story from Luke’s point of view. Mary has been visited by the angel Gabriel and told that she is going to have a son named Jesus. She asks the angel how this is possible since she is a virgin and the angel says that nothing is impossible with God. Can you imagine how terrified Mary must have been? She was probably around fourteen years old, engaged and getting ready to leave her parents’ house for her new husband’s house. Next thing she knew an angel appeared and says that upon Mary’s consent, a baby, God’s baby, was going to grow inside of her. In response to that request, Mary found herself filled with a sudden desire to say yes, and so she did. Then in the blink of an eye, she was alone again, although she was actually not alone at all.

Mary gets out of her parents’ house as quickly as possible and heads to her cousin Elizabeth. The angel had also told her that Elizabeth was carrying around her own growing miracle. Elizabeth takes one look at Mary and feels the child in her own womb do a dance of joy. Elizabeth shouts out that Mary is blessed among women and blessed with the God-baby that is growing inside of Mary’s body. I wonder if Mary really felt blessed? Then Elizabeth says the first confession of faith in Luke’s Gospel. The mother of my Lord comes to me. Mary might have been so overwhelmed and afraid by the reality that she was going to have a baby that she had forgotten what the angel had told her. “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.” Those were the angel’s first words to Mary, to bless her. Mary may have been so caught up in her fear that she forgot that the angel first addressed her as favored one, as one God claimed.

 God had chosen her. She was young, ordinary, and a poor peasant who lived in an occupied land, but God had chosen her. God had blessed her. God had favored her. Mary remembered her true identity in God. It is something that we remind ourselves anytime someone is baptized. Our true identity has nothing to do with our age or our station in life. Our identity is as a child of God. God’s blessing and claim embraces us just as it embraced Mary. There is nothing that can take that identity away from Mary or from any of us. Not fear, not the powerful, and not any mistake that we make.

 Mary then begins to sing how her soul gives glory to God, her heart pours out its praise. Mary knows that God has chosen her to be a part of whatever is happening next. Mary sings a song of praise for all that God has done, was doing and would do not only for herself but for all who benefit from God’s actions. She praises God for removing kings from their thrones, for elevating and dignifying the lowly ones, for filling the hungry, and for taking away the purchasing power of the rich. She praises God for God’s continuing mercy and work of justice-making.

 Mary sings with strength and fury on behalf of every single person who has ever felt that God has forgotten God’s promise to work out God’s justice for all people; God’s promise to be with them forever; God’s promise to shepherd them in hard times and in good times; God’s promise to dry every tear; God’s promise to do a new thing even if it cannot yet be imagined. Last week we heard in the news about Jakelin from Guatemala. She was seven years old when she died in the custody of U.S. Border Patrol. Details are conflicting, but we know that a seven year old girl is dead and her name is Jakelin. Mary’s song calls on us as Christians to speak up for the defenseless.

Last week Rosalee Chan from our Chancel Choir sang the words of a song called “A Weary Couple” by Adam Tice. Rosalee sang these words, “An angel came to Joseph in his dreaming and warned him so his family could flee. As they escaped King Herod’s evil scheming, the son of God became a refugee. How many children die without such warning? How many mothers will not be consoled, their voices choked with anger, tears, and mourning, for songs unsung and stories never to be told?” As Jesus’ mother Mary sings, she is dreaming of a new world surrounded by the rubble of the old.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Mary’s song is radical. Did you know it was banned being sung or read in India under British rule? It was banned by the military junta in Argentina in the late 1970's after the Mothers of the Disappeared put its words on posters and marched in front of the presidential palace.[[3]](#footnote-3) Mary sings for the poor, for refugees, for victims of violence because the birth of Jesus turns the world upside down. With his birth God favors the lowly, God lifts up the marginalized, God does great things for those whom society casts aside. Mary and Elizabeth knew what it felt like to be lifted up when you are the lowly. They knew what it felt like to be free of shame and finally distanced from disgrace. Mary and Elizabeth see that the promises of Christmas have already come true in their own lives.

Mary sings for us who are waiting between God’s coming to set the world and us right in the birth of Jesus and God’s returning to finish the job. Mary sings and announces the inauguration of a new kingdom that stands in stark contrast to every other kingdom. God’s kingdom doesn’t rely on violence and exploitation to achieve greatness. Mary sings to show us that God stands with the humble, not the powerful. God stands with the poor, not the rich. God stands with people on the margins, not with the occupying force. God stands with an unwed, unbelieved teenage girl entrusted with the holy task of birthing, nursing, and nurturing God.[[4]](#footnote-4)

In Jesus God makes a home among the very people the world casts aside and Mary, a dark-skinned woman, a refugee, a religious minority in an occupied land, sings that reality.[[5]](#footnote-5) Mary sings out of gratitude and joy. I wonder how many words she sang before she couldn’t feel the fear anymore? How many words did she sing before she didn’t feel the worry anymore? How many words did she sing before she felt peace and courage and God’s presence with her? How many words did she sing before she believed that God has made a home among us?

 Mary sings and she reminds us of when Hannah sang praising so God long before. Hannah and Mary sing when they feel overwhelmed by fear and their joy and gratitude overcomes their fear. Mary sings today and it reminds us that we count. It reminds us that God works through Mary, an ordinary, poor, young woman. Mary’s song reminds us that God surrenders power, sets aside privilege, and God becomes flesh in the smallness and vulnerability of a baby in a womb. Mary’s song reminds us that God works through each one of us and that God blesses us, God claims us, and God promises to grow new life in us as well. May we sing Mary’s song today and believe that God claims each one of us. Amen.

1. http://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/a-blue-christmas-jeff-strite-sermon-on-christmas-142077.asp [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://soundcloud.com/thewordisresistance/twir-122318-magnify-the-children [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. https://kairoscenter.org/sermons-bible-studies-liturgies/politics-christmas-roman-empire/marys-magnificat-luke-146-55/ [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. https://rachelheldevans.com/blog/unsentimental-advent [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. https://rachelheldevans.com/blog/unsentimental-advent [↑](#footnote-ref-5)