



Advent IV 2009 (C)

Luke 1: 39-55

December 20, 2009

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+O Emmanuel, "God with us," open our minds and hearts to the knowledge and love of you, our joy and Redeemer. Amen.

In just a little while, the church will be filled with little feet scurrying about, angels, shepherds, lambs, Mary, Joseph, all the characters we have come to associate with the Christmas pageant in the Episcopal Tradition, and what a grand event it is in the life of the Church. Somehow, we have journeyed through Advent, lighting candle after candle in the Advent Wreath, hearing scripture texts week after week that have challenged us, truly challenged us. We have been asked to look deep within ourselves, to 'soul search.' We've asked God to help us see who we are in light of the message of the scriptures as we have been called to prepare the way of the Lord.

You and I have been on a journey of faith, unlike any other journey in our liturgical tradition. We began our liturgical year with this season of introspection, a season of preparation, a season of hope, a season of expectation. Today, we hear scripture texts from Micah and Luke that call us to be attentive in yet another way.

This Sunday, the Fourth Sunday of Advent, has a different feel to it. We're on the threshold of something new, something remembered, yet something that seems fresh year after year. Today, our thoughts center on Mary, she who the prophets like Isaiah and Micah anticipated. Today, Luke gives us an inside look into the make-up of this young girl, perhaps all of thirteen years old. Mary somehow had the courage to say "yes" to an angel, a Godly presence that turned her life and that of her espoused husband upside down.

Who is this person, Mary? Why is her *Fiat*, her "yes" to the God's invitation to discipleship key to our appreciation of her and her life's journey as the mother of Jesus? Who is this person, who in the presence of her cousin, Elizabeth, also with child, acclaimed the beautiful text we call the *Magnificat*. We hear this great canticle of praise not only in today's Gospel but in our Prayer Book as well.

Monks and nuns in the monastic tradition of the church recite or sing the *Magnificat* every day in their Office of Evening Prayer often after processing to an image of Mary. If we were to join the brothers at St. John's Monastery in Cambridge for Evening Prayer, we would see the monks recess after Evening Prayer to stand and sing this great hymn of praise. The image of Mary and her great hymn help to remind us of her incredible dedication to the will of God. She bore Jesus, the Son of God, the Redeemer of humanity, the source of our salvation.

In Luke's Gospel, Mary acclaims, "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior." When we look carefully, Mary's hymn of praise takes a turn, a twist, because Luke's Gospel is very much about the lowly, the poor, the lonely, the lame, the disenfranchised, the neglected of society.

Luke's Gospel is said by some to be the 'Gospel of the Poor.' The message of God's salvation came to Mary, relatively poor young women. The message of the angels heralding Christ's birth was a message to poor shepherds in the fields as they watched their flocks by night. Shepherds were poor, uneducated. In some cases, they were considered the lowest of society, as some even stole from others' flocks by night. So, why is this great message especially significant for the poor?

Luke tells us that “God has cast down the mighty from their thrones and lifted up the *lowly*. God has filled the *hungry* with good things, and the rich, God has sent away empty.” As we know, Jesus came to the poor, to right the injustices of society, to heal the ills of the economic and religious structures of his day, to reform the Jewish Tradition, to proclaim that God had come to ransom God’s people and to save us from sin and the sins of the injustice in the world.

You and I stand in awe of this might while also standing in awe of what we will celebrate in just a few days. We will once again recall Christ’s birth to a humble couple in a humble stable: Jesus, born in a lowly manger, amidst cattle and sheep, a baby born to Mary and born in the hearts of all who proclaim Christ as our strength and Redeemer. And yet, we can’t just stand in awe, can we?

Like Mary our sister in faith, we are called to say “yes” to God’s invitation to discipleship. We, like Mary the first and greatest disciple of Jesus, are called to walk to the manger and to journey beyond Bethlehem. We are called to witness to the life and ministry of Jesus, his miracles, his teaching on hillsides and in synagogues. We are called to be with him in the Garden, on the cross, his glorious resurrection, and his return to his Father so that the promised Spirit of God could come and reign in the hearts and minds of his followers.

Our response to that call of discipleship can’t be a passive. We can’t just proclaim the “greatness of the Lord.” We have to bring the Christ’s message of hope and transformation to others, to our own lives, our families, our neighbors, and to the poor, those much less fortunate than we. Perhaps, we are called today to embrace Luke’s Gospel as our own and take seriously what it means to give of ourselves so that others might have life.

How each one of us does that is up to us. There is no handwriting on the wall. There is just this Jesus who came into the world that we might have life. As Christians, this is not really an option. As followers of Christ and as his disciples, we are called and challenged to say “yes” as Mary said “yes.” We are called and challenged to be Christ-bearers to the world.

In these final days of Advent, there’s still time. We still have time to make up our minds to follow, to walk with Mary and Joseph, to walk with the shepherds. There’s still time to hear the message of the angels and proclaim in our hearts, on our lips and with our lives that God reigns in our hearts. Because of that, we can make the world a better place in which to live for us and for all God’s people. Amen!