

Fourth Sunday of Advent (year c) December 22, 2024

Prayer of the Day

Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. With your abundant grace and might, free us from the sin that binds us, that we may receive you in joy and serve you always, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

Gospel Luke 1:39-45

Mary Visits Elizabeth

39 In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, **40** where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.

41 When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit **42** and exclaimed with a loud cry,

"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. **43** And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? **44** For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy.

45 And blessed is she who believed that there would be[a] a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

Mary's Song

And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favour on the lowly state 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; indeed, 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 imagination 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 come to the aid of his child Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

Sermon

When Mary comes calling at cousin Elizabeth's house, things were probably just a little weird. Zechariah the head of the household and high priest for that year was dumbstruck. Literally. The angel Gabriel shushed him—evidently for sassing back when God's messenger told him that after years and years of being dissed by the community for not having children, Zechariah and Elizabeth had better get the nursery ready. What's more, the little one would be full of the Holy Spirit even in utero. The baby would be called John...the one we know as John the Baptist, but I doubt '*the Baptist*' was written on the birth certificate. Gabriel announces that John call people to remember who and whose they are and that many would return to their trusting relationship with the God of Sarah and Abraham and all the prophets. Zechariah's question seems fair enough. How can a couple our age have children? Evidently he lost the plot and lost his voice in the process. So...he's left pantomiming his way through his priestly duties and passing notes. It's the women folk who speak as prophets and who proclaim God's steadfast mercy.

Mary might have expected Elizabeth to be all judgey and 'rebukey' because the chronology of baby first, marriage second often brought out the judgey and rebukey-ness in people—Elizabeth, endured her own fair share of scoff and scorn because she never had children. Elizabeth of all people knows God sometimes colours outside the lines we draw and Spirit inspires her to speak a blessing.

At the sound of Mary's voice, Elizabeth feels her baby leap within her—leap, mind you! Elizabeth proclaims the goodness of God—who has not abandoned her people but rather is active and bringing about fulfillment of ancient promises made to the ancestors Sarah and Abraham— promises renewed among the prophets.

And Mary sings—

If you've read the liner notes of Mary's song you might be forgiven if you think you've heard the lyric somewhere before. Remember Hannah? Hannah, a woman so heart broken and sure God had abandoned her that the priests thought she high on something when she prayed to God. Hannah learns she is with the child who would grow up to be the priest Samuel...the one who anointed Israel's first King, Saul—and **she** sings. She sings of unheard of reversals where God looks upon the poor and downtrodden and lifts them up. Now, Mary's song reprises Hannah's Mary praises God who makes promises and keeps them—

Even ol' Zechariah comes around eventually. He bucks society's convention of naming children after their fathers. When he writes down the name of the baby....the one the angel told him...suddenly Zechariah regains the power of speech. Evidently he had been saving up because he sings, belting out praises to and about the one whose tender mercy will

will break upon us,(and) shine upon those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." (Luke 1:78-79)