

12/20/09 Advent 4c

Micah 5:2-5a; Luke 1:39-55

"Magnificat" Rev Seth D. Jones with Choir, directed by Dick Einsel

REFLECTION ON MICAH 5 & ANGEL'S MESSAGE TO MARY

"And He will arise and shepherd His flock

In the strength of the Lord,

In the majesty of the name of the Lord His God.

And they will remain,

Because at that time He will be great

To the ends of the earth.

And this One will be our peace." (Micah 5:2-5a)

The exaltation of the Lord begins

in the simple reality of pregnancy.

This is the astonishing thing about the God who shepherds God's flock.

God's majesty is heralded with a kick from the inside,

a pregnant unmarried young woman seeking the guidance of an older, wiser woman, who also carries an unlikely child.

The shepherd of the human flock,

the great majesty of God,

begins in the simple things.

It begins in the body.

It begins in the dirt and dust.

It begins in darkness.

God's majesty,

God's strength shines through in weakness.

"God's weakness is stronger than human strength"

but, we are

"sown in weakness"

and it is in the birth, death and resurrection of

Mary's child that we are

"raised in power". (1 Cor 1:25)

This is not the power of pride and status.

This is not the power of those who sit on thrones.

This is not the power of wealth and strength.

No.

The power of God is the power of Mary and Elizabeth.

The power of God is the simple reality of water

with which John the Baptist baptizes.
The power of God is the simple reality of the Spirit
with which Jesus Christ baptizes each of us.

This God of power comes to Mary.
Mary was born of poverty in Nazareth.
Mary was young and unmarried.
Mary was a woman in a time when the word of a woman meant nothing in the culture,
a time when the status of a woman was no better than that of a slave or a child.
And this is to whom the angel of God appears.
This is who finds favor with God.
This is the power of God.

And this is what we wait for in Advent.
This is what comes into the world on Christmas Day.
The simple power of God.

Mary knows this.
She is witness to the simple, bodily, down-to-earth power of God, just as Sarah and Hannah before her.
Mary knows she is witnessing in the birth of Jesus Christ the Great Reversal of everything that has gone before.
The high becomes low,
the poor and downtrodden are raised up,
the humble and silent are exalted.

Mary, in the presence of Elizabeth,
two mothers to be in the most unlikely circumstances,
sings:

Choir:

(My soul doth magnify the Lord and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior, for He hath regarded the lowliness of his hand-maiden.

And his mercy is on them that fear him, throughout all generations. He hath showed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

My Soul Doth Magnify the Lord verses 1-2; 5-6

REFLECTION ON JOSEPH AND HIS EXPERIENCE

When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.
¹⁹ Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly.

²⁰ But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

²² All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

²³ "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us."

²⁴ When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife,

²⁵ but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus. (Matthew 1:18-25)

In all the splendor and wonder of Mary's visitation by angels and birth of the son of God and Man, we often forget Mary was betrothed to Joseph.

Before they were married, Joseph and others found out she was already pregnant.

This was a disaster for Mary -
a crime punishable if not by death,

then at least by a life of extreme poverty and exclusion because of her indiscretion.

But it was also a disaster for Joseph, whose reputation was reflected in the purity of the woman he was to marry.

Joseph was a carpenter.

Joseph knew what it was like to work and work hard.

Joseph knew the value of doing good work in the community and of being a man of status,

even when one's work meant you would never rise above a life that meant constant struggle.

Status,

reputation,

looking good in the eye's of others.

Not much has changed for men in all these years.

And often, even now, it is the lot of men everywhere to make choices on the basis of status, reputation and bank accounts,

often because they feel those are the only choices available to them.

Joseph was no different.

And this is to whom the angel of God appears.

In the coming of God to Joseph, new possibilities opened up. Another choice was presented to him.

The choice is revolutionary in its simplicity,

but the costs are also high.

In choosing God, Joseph loses his reputation.

What he loses in reputation,

he gains in freedom and hope for the future.

In choosing Mary, Joseph loses status.

What he loses in status,

he gains in the deeper relationship of mother, child and father.

In choosing God, Joseph chose

love,

life

and a legacy of promise.

These decisions do not come easily for people, however.

We are human and part of being human is to struggle with knowing what the right thing to do might be.

How do we hear God through

the pressures of culture,

of expectations from neighbors,

parents,

history

and tradition?

How do we choose something different from any of the options given?

Only with God's help.

If you take a moment,

you can imagine what Joseph's struggles must have sounded like in his mind and heart:

Choir: Young Mary was to be my wife, the mother of my sons, but when I heard she was with child, I would not take her home. No other's love would be my bride; no other's child my son. Then in a dream I heard God's voice, "Go love her as your own." Despite my shame and shattered hopes, I took the angel's word.

Another's love lay in my arms; I loved her as my own. With joy and pain she bore a child; I thought "no son of mine." Yet, when I held him in my arms, I loved him as my own.

Young Mary Was to Be My Wife

verses 1-2

REFLECTION ON MARY AS PRECURSOR TO CHRIST

Mary faces a deeply uncertain future,

but in the face of that uncertainty,

Mary sings a song of joy and praise.

Joseph faces a moment where

he can be held up in the eyes of his neighbors,

or he can be held up in the eyes of God,

and in the face of those options,

Joseph chooses what God has in store for him.

The coming of Jesus reverses the normal flow of Joseph and Mary's life.
In choosing to act on God's behalf and behest,
Mary and Joseph's lives move in a direction neither of them could ever have predicted beforehand
but looking backward through their lives,
living backward, if you will,
they see the presence of God's hand everywhere.
And so it is for us in a life with Christ.

The great theologian from 200 AD, Irenaeus,
called this living backward,
this re-establishment of our lives from the perspective of God, this pressing into the future by
looking into the past,
"recapitulation", which means "to put a new head on".
The advent of Jesus Christ into the world, however,
is not just a psychological exercise,
it is not just a better way of thinking.
It is, rather, a "Great Reversal" for all of Creation.
In Christ, we are living toward the completeness and wholeness God has already provided for us in
the grace of Christ.
In the coming of Jesus into the world,
sons return to their fathers
who welcome them with love and open arms,
even though they have left
and spent all their inheritance
and brought dishonor upon the family (Luke 15).

In the grace of Jesus,
the sick and the dead rise up full of life (Mark 5, John 11, many others).
In the presence of Christ,
we live into our completeness,
our wholeness.

In the love of Jesus Christ,
the mighty are brought low,
the poor and troubled are exalted,
the suffering are healed,
the comfortable are afflicted
and the afflicted are comforted.

It is thus in the Advent of the Christ child we can sing with the magnificent joy of Mary

and welcome into the world that which returns all things to their perfect completeness.
God does this through a poor, young, unmarried woman
and a poor, young, working man.

And God has done all this for all of God's Creation,
for each of us, out of love.

*"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,
so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (John
3:16).*

Choir: For unto us a child is born;

Unto us a son is given;

*And his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, Almighty God, the Everlasting Father,
the Prince of Peace.*

For Unto Us a Child is Born

opening

Joy to the World

Congregation