

December 19th 2021

4th Sunday in Advent; Year C

Micah 5: 2-5a

Canticle 15

Luke 1: 39-45

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."

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Last night the Christmas Pageant at Trinity was held in the Pavilion, marked by its usual chaos and joy, not unlike that holy night thousands of years ago.

It was the 29th year I have directed a Christmas Pageant in my ministry, and I found myself contemplating this ancient story anew, and especially thinking of Mary. Our Mary and Joseph and Angel Gabriel last night were from our teenagers at Trinity, Josie, Spencer and Madison.

For the past several years Trinity has had babies among our families or our grandchildren, so Mary and Joseph have been played by the baby's parents,

thus keeping them close at hand.

But this year our cast, especially Mary, was closer to the age of the real Mary. Josie is 14 years old, and she did a, well, magnificent job as Mary!

On this 4th Sunday of Advent our readings finally come into what we think of as the Christmas story. Our psalm today is replaced by the Song of Mary, Mary's words from Luke once she has said yes to the Angel Gabriel's invitation to bear the Christ Child.

Our old Testament lesson from Micah predicts the birth of the holy child in Bethlehem.

And our Gospel lesson brings the past few weeks and the stories of John the Baptist's remarkable parentage and birth and life, into connection with Mary. We see Mary after she is pregnant leaving Nazareth, her hometown, where the whispers are loud about her pregnancy before marriage, and traveling to see her cousin Elizabeth.

Elizabeth is now pregnant in her old age, undoubtedly another topic of village whispers, and Mary seeks her out as a relative, and even more as the only one who can understand what it feels like to receive God's surprising and bewildering call. And as the one who can listen as Mary speaks of God's call as even frightening and dangerous.

We use many words to describe Mary, holy of course, patient, mild, but we

forget to call her courageous.

Elizabeth's call to bear John in her old age was bewildering and undoubtedly led to gossip, but it was not dangerous. The birth of John, while unusual, was still the fulfillment of Elizabeth and Zechariah's lifelong yearning for a child.

In contrast, Mary's call was risky, and terribly dangerous.

As you well know, Mary and Joseph were betrothed, promised to each other by their fathers, we might say engaged, but not married.

When Mary tells Joseph of the visit of the Angel Gabriel, and that she is pregnant, Joseph does not believe her.

The gospel of Matthew tells us that Joseph planned to break the betrothal quietly, a compassionate response from Joseph as he had the right to tell the village and have Mary stoned for adultery.

So Joseph planned to do the most compassionate thing his imagination allowed him to think, to break off the betrothal and end his connection to Mary quietly.

But still to break a betrothal was close to death for a woman; she would never be able to marry, as she has born a child out of wedlock. Her family would be ashamed of her, and might shun her and the child, or at least offer little money and no full membership in the life of the family.

The society made no allowance for a mother with a child out of wedlock, and

so she would be among those that could only count on occasions of kindness, she would be like a stranger, a foreigner in her own world.

So we must use the word courageous to describe Mary; she knows the perilous possibilities in her path ahead when she says yes to her call from God, and still she says....YES.

In fact Mary says a spirit-filled yes, as we hear in her song:

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,

my spirit rejoices in God my Savior

for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.

From this day all generations will call me blessed:

the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his Name.

He has mercy on those who fear him

in every generation.

We might also do well to notice in The Song of Mary the references to the “lowly”; Mary calls herself God’s lowly servant, and that God has cast down the mighty from their thrones and has lifted up the lowly, the poor, those who go unnoticed on our streets, in our world.

As we draw close to Christmas 2021 may we, in honor of Mary,

notice the young people, the teenagers who are courageous in our world, who speak up for the lowly, for those with no voices.

We might find ourselves at first ruffled by young voices, even irritated by young voices who we might think just need to be quiet and learn from us elders.

But as we were once, these teenagers are our hope for the future, called at such young ages, just like Mary.

I think of Greta Thunberg, the Swedish teenager who has spoken out on climate change.

I think of David Hogg, the teenager, who with others, spoke out after the Valentine's Day school shooting in 2018 at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High school in Parkland Florida that killed 17 people.

And I think of Darnella Frazier the teenager who stopped on a Minneapolis street and filmed on her phone the arrest and killing of George Floyd, providing crucial evidence in trial of police officer Derek Chauvin.

So may we hear not classical music in The Song of Mary, but first may we hear an exultant, glorious song that speaks of God's

care for the frightened in our world, that speaks of God's attention not to the mighty on their thrones, but to the lowly, the hungry, the poor, the widowed and orphans, the strangers, the foreigners.

One commentator speaks of the Song of Mary...noting for all of us:

“ The words are very clear. It is living out a life of gratitude and praise and being open to God working in our lives even in times of great stress. Our role model is an unmarried, pregnant young girl who is enabled by the love of her older relative to express her faith in her God so eloquently.” (Joanna Seibert in *The Living Church*)

And may we join with Elizabeth, Mary's wise support and guide, who said:

And blessed is (Mary) who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

Amen.

