

Sermon Advent 4, Year B

Canticle 15, The Magnificat, Luke 1:46-55

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.

He has shown the strength of his arm, *
he has scattered the proud in their conceit.

He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, *
and has lifted up the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things, *
and the rich he has sent away empty.

He has come to the help of his servant Israel, *
for he has remembered his promise of mercy,

The promise he made to our fathers, *
to Abraham and his children for ever.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: *
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. *Amen.*

Luke 1:26-38

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Prayer:

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy spirit...

- AMEN

Sermon:

I love the Magnificat. It reminds me that I could use more humility.

“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord”.

“My spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
Who has looked with favor on his lowly servant.”

For me Christmas is about being home, with my family,

And finding a place to rest with the Lord. ⁱ

...

There fared a mother driven forth
Out of an inn to roam;
In the place where she was homeless
All men are at home.

...

To the end of the way of the wandering star,
To the things that cannot be and that are,
To the place where God was homeless
And all men are at home. ⁱⁱ

Christmas is the safe place we're all looking for.

Today, we heard St. Luke'sⁱⁱⁱ story about the angel Gabriel
visiting the Virgin Mary, ^{iv}

“Greetings, O favored one! Our God is with you.”

“Our God is with you.” Man, I love those words!

But, Mary was troubled by them.

One New Testament skeptic asked,

“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”^v

Nazareth was a 1st Century economic Dustbowl.

Nazareth was Mary’s her home town, but the day the angel came,
she was already on the way -- up and out.

Mary was a nice Virgin girl, engaged to a successful carpenter.

She’s thinking honest work, steady income, and a family ...

a nice social bump up for a Dustbowl peasant girl.

But, then along came Angel Gabriel, with really bad news:

“Greetings, O favored one. ... You’re having a baby.”

The scary angel came with a scary message. Hard to believe.

Mary was a Virgin. Even 2,000 years ago,

Everyone pretty much knew that meant no babies.

Many of us love surprises; *I wonder how she liked hers!?*

She must have thought, at least for a second, “I’m screwed”.^{vi}

The Bible says she pondered all this in her heart. *I bet she did.*

But we usually don't think too much about the details.

We know how the story ends. But Mary had no clue.

After 21 centuries of chatter, we mostly still don't get it.

- Protestants focus on Gabriel's word of grace.
- Anglo-Catholics venerate the Blessed Virgin.
- Patriarch's will note that the angel appeared as a man.
- Feminists note that Salvation hinged on a woman's assent.
- Humanists point out that a human vessel could contain God.
- Believers claim that Christ was divine.
- Skeptics wonder, "How that can be?"
- Optimists hopefully declare: "Nothing is impossible."

Mary knew nothing about all that. She simply said:

"Here am I... Lord ...let it be with me according to your word." vii

God invites us to say, *"Here, I am, Lord"*.

Mary had to change her plans. And, perhaps, so do we!

The Annunciation is about God changing people's lives.

We might like to sanitize and summarize the Annunciation,

And to reduce it to a few pithy ideas,

But it was – and it is - way too big!!!

We don't get to package God, and His message, for our tastes.

God was, and is, way too big to fit wrap into a convenient little box,

That we take down from a shelf, for a few minutes,

each Christmas and Easter.

God had a plan for Mary, and God has a plan for each of us

The *Magnificat* tells us about that plan!

- To help bring the powerful down from their thrones.
- To lift up the lowly.
- To feed the hungry and to send the rich away.^{viii}

Mary was meek and mild and lowly.

“Lowly” as in low on the social scale. “working class”.

No investment capital. Poor. No political power.

No voice. No friends in high places.

No advocates, and no union. *And no politician to kiss her baby.*

Still, at the end of the angel's terrifying appearance,

Mary, the poor peasant girl, said:

“OK”. *“For nothing will be impossible with God.”*

God loves to do the impossible. Even the absurd. *In know that.*

Mary was an ordinary person. In the Ordinary world. ^{ix}

God still uses ordinary people like you and me.^x *Every day!*

God still does the impossible?

God loves to ordinary stuff, to make Divine stuff happen.^{xi}

I once read about a church's outdoor nativity scene.

You know, the usual suspects:

Mary and Joseph, shepherds and wise men, and a few animals,

Each cut from plywood and lovingly painted.

An old crate had been lined with hay, for the manger.

The day before the big Christmas service,

As the gardener was tidying things up. She heard a baby's cry.

When she checked out the manger scene,

she saw a baby girl, wrapped in a towel!

There was a note pinned to the towel: *“Please take care of my child.”*

Christmas has always been full of surprises.

That's the way it was. That's the way it should be.

-AMEN

ⁱ And after 9 months of the chatter and anger and pressure of Covid, a little rest would sure be nice.

ⁱⁱ Gilbert Keith "GK" Chesterton KC (1874-1936), a writer, philosopher, lay theologian, and critic, who was influenced by, inter alia, Thomas Aquinas and Charles Dickens. He also famously said, "The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult, and left untried."

ⁱⁱⁱ The great physician and a friend of St. Paul.

^{iv} This is the 4th Sunday of Advent. Each year we hear a different part of the great story involving the Angel, Joseph, Mary and her cousin Elizabeth.

^v "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked. 'Come and see,' said Philip." (John 1:46, NIV)

^{vi} "If this is what it looks for God to be with me, what will it look like if He is against me?!"

^{vii} Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night
I will go, Lord, if you lead me
I will hold your people in my heart. Dan Schutte

^{viii} See, Luke 1:46-55.

^{ix} New Testament scholar Beverly Gaventa pointed out the Angel says nothing about Mary's virtue, worthiness, suitability, or faithfulness. Noting to explain why God chose her. We are told, simply, that God did. (See, Beverly Gaventa, *Texts for Preaching Year B*).

^x The Lord has made everything for a purpose. (Proverbs 16:4 Before we were formed in the womb God had holy plans for each of us. (Jeremiah 1:5).

^{xi} To be part of whatever God is doing we only have to say "Yes"! Mary did. We can. We should. Will there be surprises along the way? Absolutely! With God it's all about Trust. "Let it be with me according to your word."