

ADVENT 4, DECEMBER 19, 2021
LUKE 1: 39-55
TRADITIONAL

THREE MONTHS BEFORE THE BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST, EIGHT MONTHS AND A COUPLE OF WEEKS BEFORE THE BIRTH OF JESUS, A NEWLY PREGNANT GIRL NAMED MARY TOOK OFF IN GREAT HASTE FOR THE HILL COUNTRY WHERE HER VERY ELDERLY AND FORMERLY BARREN COUSIN ELIZABETH WAS AWAITING THE BIRTH OF HER FIRSTBORN SON, TO BE NAMED JOHN.

MARY HAD SEEN AN ANGEL AND HAD HEARD INCREDIBLE, MIRACULOUS NEWS, AND IN THE WAY ALL WE HUMANS NEED, HER FIRST AND OVERRIDING DESIRE WAS TO REACH OUT TO THE ONLY OTHER PERSON WHO MIGHT UNDERSTAND, THE ONLY OTHER PERSON WHO WAS MENTIONED BY THE ANGEL: “YOUR KINSWOMAN ELIZABETH IN HER OLD AGE HAS ALSO CONCEIVED A SON; AND THIS IS THE SIXTH MONTH WITH HER WHO WAS CALLED BARREN. FOR WITH GOD, NOTHING WILL BE IMPOSSIBLE.”

GOD GIVES MARY AND ELIZABETH TWO THINGS THEY EACH LACKED – COMMUNITY AND CONNECTION. GOD REMOVES THEIR ISOLATION AND HELPS THEM TO UNDERSTAND THEMSELVES MORE FULLY AS PART OF SOMETHING LARGER THAN THEIR INDIVIDUAL DESTINIES. TOGETHER THEY ARE KNOWN MORE FULLY AND BEGIN TO SEE MORE CLEARLY THAN THEY DID AS INDIVIDUALS. THIS IS TRULY A MESSAGE OF ADVENT HOPE AND UNDERSTANDING.

AND IN THAT UNDERSTANDING, MARY SINGS – AND IF YOU REALLY COMPREHEND THE WORDS OF HER BEAUTIFUL SONG, YOU WILL SOON REALIZE WHAT A REBEL SONG IT WAS. WE HAVE HEARD SO MANY BEAUTIFUL RENDITIONS OF THESE WORDS, THAT IT MAKES IT HARD TO HEAR THE WARNING WITHIN.

SHE STARTS OUT WITH THE BEAUTIFUL PRONOUNCEMENT OF HER SOULD MAGNIFYING THE LORD AS HER SPIRIT REJOICES IN GOD. NOTICE, SHE DOES NOT SAY, “MY SOULD MAGNIFIES ITSELF” OR “EXALTS ME”. SHE MAGNIFIES GOD

ALONE AND GIVES ALL GLORY TO GOD. SHE LEAVES HERSELF OUT AND ASCRIBES EVERYTHING TO THE ONE FROM WHOM SHE HAS RECEIVED THIS FAVOR, ECHOING THE ANGEL GABRIEL'S WORDS TO HER.

THEN THIS SONG TAKES AN INTERESTING TURN. GOD DOESN'T JUST LOOK WITH FAVOR ON **HER**, BUT RATHER ON HER **LOWLINESS**. GOD, ACCORDING TO MARY, NOTICES HER – HER STATION AND HER STRUGGLE, AND INCREDIBLY, TAKES HER SIDE.

ALL GENERATIONS WILL CALL HER BLESSED, BECAUSE GOD – THE MIGHTY ONE OF ISRAEL, HAS DONE GREAT THINGS FOR HER, THAT HE REGARDED HER, WHICH IS THE GREATEST OF HIS WORKS AS MARTIN LUTHER SAYS IN HIS COMMENTARY ON THE MAGNIFICAT, AND ON WHICH ALL THE REST DEPEND.

FOR WHEN GOD TURNS HIS FACE TOWARD ONE TO REGARD THEM, THERE IS NOTHING BUT GRACE AND SALVATION. AND AS WE WILL DISCOVER, FOR ALL WHO ARE LIKE MARY – POOR, LOWLY, OF LITTLE ACCOUNT IN THE WORLD, AND WHO TRUST GOD FOR THEIR REDEMPTION, GOD HAS REGARD FOR THEM AS WELL.

JUST WHAT EXACTLY IS GOD DOING FOR MARY, FOR ELIZABETH, AND FOR ALL THE LOWLY OF THE WORLD? HE'S SCATTERING THE PROUD, BRINGING DOWN THE POWERFUL, LIFTING UP THE LOWLY, GIVING THOSE WHO ARE HUNGRY PLENTY TO EAT AND SENDING THE RICH AWAY WITH NOTHING.

HER SONG IS NOTHING NEW IN THE BIBLE. PROPHETS OF ALL SORTS HAVE SUNG THE SAME – THAT GOD CARES FOR ALL PEOPLE, BUT HAS A SPECIAL INTEREST IN THE POOR, THE WEAK, AND THE VULNERABLE. HANNAH, IN 1 SAMUEL 2:8 SINGS A SIMILAR SONG. THE POOR, SHE SINGS ARE RAISED UP BY THE LORD, RAISED UP FROM THE DUST, LIFTED UP FROM THE ASH HEAP, TO MAKE THEM SIT WITH PRINCES AND TO INHERIT A SEAT OF HONOR.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF HOPE WITHIN A COMMUNITY TAKES TIME – REMEMBER, BEFORE THE LORD MADE HIMSELF KNOW TO MARY, HE HAD BEEN SILENT FOR OVER 400 YEARS. HOW MANY OF YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED THE SILENCE OF THE LORD? HOW MANY OF YOU ARE AWAITING AN OPPORTUNITY TO CONNECT MORE DEEPLY WITH THE PEOPLE AROUND YOU, TO CONNECT YOUR SEEMINGLY SMALL STORY WITH THE LARGER STORIES OF GOD?

WHAT IF YOU DECIDED TO START EACH DAY WITH THE AFFIRMATION THAT, LIKE MARY, YOU ARE HIGHLY FAVORED BY GOD? WOULD THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

IN OUR TEXT, MARY SINGS ABOUT **GOD FILLING THE HUNGRY WITH GOOD THINGS BUT SENDING THE RICH AWAY EMPTY.**

SHE'S SAYING THAT THERE ARE TWO KINDS OF PEOPLE IN THE WORLD. SOME PEOPLE HAVE LIVES THAT ARE JUST TOO FULL FOR GOD. THEIR CALENDARS AND CLOSETS AND PANTRIES AND GARAGES AND HEARTS ARE SO FILLED TO OVERFLOWING THAT THERE IS NO ROOM LEFT FOR THE LORD AND WHAT HE HAS TO OFFER THEM.

BUT OTHERS ARE HUNGRY. HUNGRY FOR HEALING. HUNGRY FOR COMPANIONSHIP. HUNGRY FOR PEACE AND THE HOPE OF A BETTER TOMORROW.

MAYBE THAT'S YOU.

THOSE WHO ARE EMPTY AND KNOW IT, ARE AVAILABLE TO BE FILLED WITH GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT AND WITH POWER.

MARY WAS AN EMPTY VESSEL. SHE HAD ROOM IN HER LIFE TO BE FILLED WITH THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. SHE HAD ROOM IN HER LIFE FOR THE POSSIBILITY OF A MIRACLE.

THAT'S WHY GOD CHOSE HER.

THAT'S WHY SHE SINGS.

AND THAT'S WHY WE NEED HER SONG.

WE NEED MARY'S SONG IN HOSPITAL ROOMS AND BOARD ROOMS AND SMOKE-FILLED ROOMS WHERE POLITICAL DEALS ARE HAMMERED OUT. WE NEED IT IN

SOUP KITCHEN LINES AND CLASSROOM LINES, AND IN REFUGEE LINES ACROSS THE WORLD.

WE NEED MARY'S SONG TO LIFT US UP AND HELP US BELIEVE THAT THERE IS MORE TO LIFE THAN MEETS THE EYE.

OTHERS LOOK AT DAILY NEWS AND TREMBLE IN FEAR, CONCLUDING THAT THERE IS NO HOPE; DETERMINED TO LOOK OUT ONLY FOR THEMSELVES.

BUT MARY SINGS US PAST ALL THE DESPAIR.

BECAUSE OF HER SONG, WE REMEMBER GOD'S MIGHTY ACTS, AND ANTICIPATE WHAT HE WILL YET DO FOR THOSE WHO DARE TO BELIEVE.

HER VISION OF A BETTER TOMORROW GROWS IN US LIKE THE CHILD IN HER WOMB, HIDDEN BUT REAL, AND SURE TO ARRIVE IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME.

HER SONG REMINDS US WHAT GOD IS UP TO ON A DAY LIKE TODAY.

HE'S FAVORING US.

HE'S SHOWING HIS MERCY AND HIS MIGHT.

HE'S SCATTERING OUR PRIDE.

HE'S FILLING THOSE OF US WHO DARE TO BE HUNGRY WITH GOOD THINGS.

MARY SINGS BECAUSE SHE TRUSTS GOD MORE THAN SHE FEARS THE UNKNOWN.

SHE SINGS BECAUSE SHE HAS CHOSEN FAITH OVER WORRY.

WHAT IF ALL OF US WERE BOLD ENOUGH TO JOIN HER?

I LIKE TO IMAGINE WHAT IT WOULD BE LIKE FOR THOSE WITH SO VERY LITTLE – POWER, WEALTH, PRIVILEGE AND HOPE, TO HEAR MARY SING HER SONG AND TO KNOW TOO THAT THEY ARE BLESSED, FAVORED, AND PART OF GOD'S PROMISE TO CHANGE THE WORLD. IN THE INCARNATION AND NAME OF JESUS. AMEN.