

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Luke 1:39-45

Reflection by Nancy Wright-DeKuyper, Layreader

Christ Church

Sunday, December 19th, 2021



Advent has been a season for stepping away from the frantic busy-ness, the clutter of bows and wrapping paper, and embracing instead a time to slow down, breathe, and refocus on God's love and goodness and "the spiritual promise of the Saviour coming." (*Anglican Journal, November 2015*)

In our Old Testament reading, the prophet Micah announces that the small tribe which settled in the little town of Bethlehem will produce the ruler of Israel.

Then, in the New Testament, there are two women—one quite old and barren, the other young — who are both nobodies and both chosen by God to bear great children.

Wonderful things can emerge from the most unexpected sources; and so a young, Jewish, unmarried woman became mother of Jesus and remains one of the most inspiring people not only in the Christian scriptures but in the two thousand years since.

In Mary we can see the effect of what happens when someone allows the promise of God to shape her whole life because she says 'yes' to God's grace with faith and trust.

Mary has just been visited by the angel Gabriel and one of the amazing things he tells her is that her "*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.*" (1:36-37)

When the angel departs, Mary immediately sets out "*with haste*" to see her cousin, Elizabeth. In this passage, Elizabeth is a huge help to Mary, giving support, offering encouragement and sharing a sense of overflowing joy.

Mary greets Elizabeth and it is Elizabeth's attentive listening to Mary's words that sets off the unborn John the Baptist's joyful leap, and Elizabeth instantly recognizes that her cousin has been blessed in an extraordinary way and that the child in her womb is also blessed.

Elizabeth is the first to express aloud the awesome role placed on Mary, and she utters the famous words, *“Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.”* (1:42)

Mary responds with a song called the Magnificat which we read aloud together a short while ago. It expresses Mary’s heartfelt belief about the child to whom she would soon give birth and the salvation God would accomplish through him.

It will still be thirty years before Jesus’ ministry begins in earnest. Yet Mary echoes Hannah and Elizabeth in her song of trust in what God is doing. (*Christmas and the seed of our hope, by, Archbishop Linda Nicholls, Anglican Journal, December 2021*)

At Christmas we celebrate Jesus as the kept promise of God, as prophesied by Micah so long ago. He will fulfill all that has gone before and give new meaning to all that has yet to come. This is the dual sense of Advent: adventus – both ‘here’ and ‘yet to come’. (*Advent Reflections Week 4, sces.org.uk, 2012*)

We are six days from Christmas Day and just about to begin our third year living with COVID-19. For most of us, this will still be a very different Christmas from what we are accustomed to. As Rev. Monique Taylor, Incumbent, St. James the Apostle Anglican Church in Brampton, writes:

“For most of us, this will be a very different Christmas from what we are used to. But something to remember is this: COVID-19 might be able to interrupt our traditions, cancel our plans, and alter our activities, but it cannot cancel Christmas.

We may not be able to celebrate as we are used to doing; our gatherings may be small and relatively quiet; but we can still know the hope, the peace, the joy and the love that the world received all those years ago when the Christ child was born to be...the light of the world.”

And, as Christmas draws near, may we be eager and generous of heart.
May we, like Mary, trust in God and bask in the joy of anticipation.
May we serve one another and experience God’s love leaping up in us.

Amen



Consulted Commentary and Exegis

Advent Miracles: That Mary Believed, December 29, 2014, lathamumc.org

Advent Reflections Week 4, sces.org.uk, 2012

Saying Yes to God: Mary's Yes by Catherine Wiecher Brunell, undated, loyalapress.org

From Shame to Blessing with Haste by Pastor Rick Morley, December 11, 2012, rickmorely.com

You Are Highly Favored by Pastor Robb McCoy, fatpastor.wordpress.com

Lectionary Blogging: Luke 1:39-55 by John Petty, December 17, 2012, progressiveinvolvement.com

Mary, the Reluctant Prophet by Alyce McKenzie, December 16, 2012, patheos.com

Sermons on Luke 1:39-45 sermoncentral.com

Contemporary Commentary on Luke 1:39-45(46-55) textweek.com

Devotionals

Advent: A Calendar of Devotions 2017 by Donald K. McKim, Abingdon Press, 2017

The Hope of Christmas, With Reflections from Our Daily Bread, ODB, 2017

Daily Reflections for Advent & Christmas: Waiting in Joyful Hope 2017-2018 by Mary DeTurris Poust, Liturgical Press, 2017

Books

The First Christmas by Marcus J. Borg & John Dominic Crossan, HarperCollins, 2007

Windows on Christmas by Bill Crowder, Discovery House, 2007

Article

"Christmas and the seed of our hope" by Archbishop Linda Nicholls, *Anglican Journal*, December 2021