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St. James', Mt. Airy
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Advent 4/C
Micah 5:2-5a
Canticle 15
Hebrews 10:5-10
Luke 1:39-55

**Gracious God, take our minds and think through them;
take our hands and work through them;
take our hearts and set them on fire.**

Amen.

Blessed is she who believed there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.

Today we finally arrive at the doorstep of Christmas. And our hope, our preparation, and our anticipation come to fruition in the story of two pregnant women greeting each other and sharing their joy, amazement, and faith in God.

Mary's visit to her relative Elizabeth was spurred on by the events that happened just prior to her journey – namely a visit from the Angel Gabriel. During that fateful encounter, Gabriel announced to Mary God's plan for her: that she would conceive, bear a son through the power of the Holy Spirit, and that that child would be called the Son of the Most High.

Understandably Mary was confused and skeptical, but to show her that nothing is impossible with God, Gabriel then told her that Elizabeth, in her old age, was also pregnant and would bear a son.

With all of this in her heart, Mary set out with haste to see Elizabeth.

I can't help but wonder why the first thing Mary did after this revelation was to journey to Elizabeth. Was it to share this astounding news? Was it to seek wisdom and counsel? Was it to see if indeed Elizabeth was indeed pregnant? Did she need confirmation of *that*, in order to **truly** believe the rest of what Gabriel imparted?

I believe that sometimes we need to hear what we already know is true from someone else to really live into that truth ourselves. Elizabeth's greeting did just that for Mary: *Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.*

Any lingering doubt that she might have clung to after Gabriel's proclamation was surely dissipated in that moment. Elizabeth's round belly, as much as her words, led Mary's heart in an instant as she embraced the fullness of the truth of what was to be.

And this truth sparked a most beautiful response. Mary responded to Gabriel simply saying, "*Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.*"

Oft described as meek and obedient – Mary's response this time is simply breath-taking:

*My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,*

for God has looked with favor on his servant.

*Surely, from now on all generations will call be blessed;
for the Mighty one has done great things for me,
and holy is God's name.*

*God has mercy for those who fear
from generation to generation*

God has shown strength with his arm;

God has scattered the proud in their hearts.

*God has brought down the powerful in their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;*

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

*God has helped his servant Israel,
remembering mercy,*

according to the promise to our ancestors,

to Abraham and Sarah and their descendents forever.¹

The *Magnificat* – The Song of Mary. This is her response to the glorious impossible that is the incarnation of Jesus. It tells us so much about who Mary understood God to be, and by extension, who her son would be – but also about who she understood herself to be in the midst of this sacred chaos.

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

¹ Inclusivised Magnificat

I'll be honest, I've never given much thought in particular to that image – *magnifying* – but a colleague pointed out that upon reading it for the millionth time, it was suddenly different.

Magnify can be taken to simply mean an expression of praise and glory.

But what if we take it literally? What does it mean to magnify something? A magnifying glass makes things bigger, it intensifies the object it focused on, making it clearer and sharper. A magnifying glass has power to spark change. Just think of one catching the sun's rays and starting a fire.

In her song, Mary claims the truth that what she is, is a magnifying glass for God. It is through her, and the son she will bear, that God is made bigger, God's love is intensified, God's mission of justice, compassion and reconciliation made clearer and sharper. She is the lens that will spark a new in-breaking of the reign of God.

And that is what she proclaims – the reversals of human power and status: *God has mercy for those who fear from generation to generation; God has shown strength with his arm; God has scattered the proud in their hearts. God has brought down the powerful in their throne, and lifted up the lowly; God has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.*

And so a question I have is this: how does the *Magnificat* both reflect **and** shape the incarnation?

Certainly Mary reflected what she already knew, pulling images from the Song of Hannah (another song written by an unexpectedly pregnant woman), a song she must have learnt and known by heart. But since we know the full story of who Jesus was and what his life and death will be, we can also see that Mary's song anticipates, perhaps even shapes, one of the most loved teaching of Jesus, the Beatitudes.

And this gets to the crux of the incarnation – the essentiality of the humanness of Jesus, humanness that comes from Mary and is loved and shaped by her. From the very beginning Mary understood this. That she would be the *Theotokos* - the God-bearer – but that since God chose to come to be with us as a vulnerable baby, it was her love and faith that would help shape the human he would become.

And so at the end of the day – at the beginning of our Christian story – Mary shows us all what it is to be fully human. To accept God's call in our lives, to seek out wisdom and council from others in community, to proclaim the reign of God and to love with our whole beings, for it through that love that the world is transformed.

We each hold a piece of the puzzle that brings the reign of God to fruition.

Because we are not all being asked to carry the Son of the most High in our wombs. But we are all, like Mary, being called to magnify God. And so Mary's song is our song too – a song that we sing until, like Mary did with Hannah's song, we turn it into our own song.

This is our call this Advent and Christmas – to magnify God’s love in the world and give birth to hope, believing like Mary that God’s reign will be fulfilled.

Blessed are those who believe that there will be a fulfillment of what has been spoken by the Lord.

~AMEN~