

“Fulfilled”

an Advent sermon based on Luke 1:39-56

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What if I told you that right now, this morning, everything you needed to get done for Christmas was already done? The cards finished, the presents bought and wrapped, the tree decorated, the dinner ready to go. Impossible? Of course. Wishful thinking? No doubt. And yet . . . and yet we know that in many ways Christmas *is* a “done deal.” No matter what happens between now and Saturday—whether or not we get everything accomplished that we hope to—Christmas will happen. It is a *fait accompli*, even a *fête accompli*—both a “deed accomplished” and a “celebration done.” And nothing we can do can stop it.

It is precisely this sense that Mary conveys in the *Magnificat* when she makes some extraordinary claims about that first Christmas. Notice how Mary speaks about what God is up to in the coming of Jesus: “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior . . . He *has* shown strength with his arm; he *has* scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.” Mary does not speak in the present tense—God is not in the process of doing these things. Nor does Mary speak in the future tense—God is not going to get around to doing these things someday. Mary announces these claims in the *past* tense—God has already “brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy.”

All this, and the birth of the baby is still a full nine months away.

Is Mary wrong? Is this just wishful thinking, or maybe a poetic way of summarizing human hopes and dreams? Is this hyperbole, an overstatement of what’s possible in order to make a point? I think not.

Mary words are an assertion of faith, and more than that, an assertion of fact that although the hungry still long to be filled and the lowly still labor to climb out of their desolate circumstances, nonetheless their deliverance is a *fait accompli*. God has willed it, Mary claims; therefore the redemption of the world is unstoppable.

Two thousand years after the birth of Christ, it would be easy to wonder whether Mary was right. It would be understandable to have doubts. It would be reasonable to lose hope. What difference has it really made that Christ has come? Of course, Christ has won our salvation as individuals, and we dare not underestimate that gracious gift. But that is not all God promised—God promised peace on earth, good will toward all; God promised the overturning of injustice, the righting of wrongs, the uneven playing field leveled. If we are honest with ourselves, if we are honest with our faith, we *must* ask, Is the world really any different for Christ’s coming? Will it ever be as Mary claimed—that the downcast will be lifted up and the empty satisfied, that the poor will be given the things which make life bearable and the rulers brought to their senses?

It is fashionable in today’s America to avoid these questions, or if we answer them at all to answer cynically: Will justice roll down like waters? You’ve got to be kidding! The world will never be just. Governments will always be corrupt and corporations greedy. Get over it. As long as you’re doing fine, don’t worry about anybody else. There’s nothing you can do about it anyway.

But Christians have a different answer. We believe that God yet has the last word. Some Christians claim that God's last word will come soon; that now the end-times are near; that the world will be destroyed in an apocalyptic conflagration; that the Rapture will lift believers off the earth in the nick of time to escape the wrath of God. As for me, I don't think we can know when or how the end will come. But what I do believe is this: It matters very much that the end is ultimately in God's hands, not the hand of fate or chance or even human planning. It matters very much that the end will come, perhaps far in the future, perhaps much sooner than we think, and when it comes that God will be in charge of it. It matters very much that God, who is faithful, will fulfill all his promises. For God has remembered his people—and in fact has never forgotten them—and all shall be made right, and peace indeed shall come.

How do we know? Because two thousand years ago God remembered his people and sent us a Savior to inaugurate an unstoppable history whose end can only be the salvation of the world. Mary is right: God's will is already accomplished, God's promise is already fulfilled. For nothing can stop what God has set out to do.

We are close now, very close, to Christmas. There are, of course, still presents to wrap and decorating to complete. There are some cards to write and dinner to prepare. And yet . . . and yet, in many ways, it is already done. Christmas will come as surely as the dawn will grace the sky. For God has made it so. Amen.