

Advent Devotional for December 21, 2023

Scripture

Luke 1:39-56

39 In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, 40 where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit 42 and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. 43 And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? 44 For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. 45 And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

*46 And Mary said,
"My soul magnifies the Lord,
47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
48 for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
50 His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
51 He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
52 He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
53 he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
54 He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
55 according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever."
56 And Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.*

Devotion

The Rev. Dr. Donna Giver-Johnston, Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program

This is a favorite passage of Scripture. It captures a tender moment filled with genuine surprise, prophetic words, and jubilant joy! Mary's powerful words are commonly called the *Magnificat*, Latin for "magnify."

Mary extols the mighty one for the great things done for her.

Mary esteems God's holy name for showing mercy from generation to generation.

Mary exalts God for showing strength: God brought down the powerful and lifted up the lowly; filled the hungry with good things; came to the aid of those in need.

Mary glorifies God with what has become known as a song of power, promise, and praise.

For what better way to magnify God's holy name?

Songs are powerful! They join us to those around us, connect us with a purpose larger than ourselves in protesting evil, proclaiming good news, and promising peace on earth.

Songs are powerful! When we sing Christmas carols, it seems that all things are possible, even the Word to become flesh and live among us.

As a pastor, a great joy of the Christmas season is to lead worship services in nursing homes. I remember once being assigned to the Alzheimer's floor, warned by the nurses that I would likely not get any response. But in December, hope springs eternal; and so I said, "Good afternoon." No response. I read Scripture. A woman raised her hand and called out, "Charlie took me to dinner." I smiled. I started the Lord's Prayer. Silence. Then, I did something crazy. I said, "Let's sing a Christmas carol: *Joy to the World, the Lord is come.*" I started singing alone. But, then I heard a voice join in, "Let earth receive her king." Then another voice sang out loud, "Let every heart prepare him room." I heard a woman cry out, "I love this song." It was as if a choir was singing together, "And heaven and nature sing, and heaven and nature sing, and heaven and heaven and nature sing."

In that tender moment, it sounded to me like a *Magnificat*, as if heaven and nature were singing together with power and promise and praise.

Prayer

Let us pray: Holy God, with Mary, our souls magnify you. We extol, esteem, and exalt your holy name. Our spirits rejoice in your power and mercy. We glorify you for your love born unto us in Jesus, for us and for our salvation. We join our voices with heaven and nature in singing, "Joy to the World, the Lord is come!" Amen.