

Micah 5:2-5a

Luke 1:9-55

Hebrews 10:5-10

“Our soul magnifies the Lord, and
our spirit rejoices in God.” AMEN!

Advent 4 is the prelude for Christmas Eve.

Here we read the prophecies and
we hear Mary’s song of praise in worship
before Christmas Eve.

It was given the title of “The Magnificat”
taken from the opening line,

“My soul (my being) magnifies the Lord.”

As we have walked the weeks of Advent
we have come to understand it to be
a season of waiting.

The first Sunday began with an
announcement about the End.

The capital “E” End where
we were called to be watchful,
looking for signs of the 2nd coming of Jesus.

Then it was week 2 and week 3, where
John the Baptist entered the scene in order

to prepare the way for the Lord and
Jesus' coming ministry in and around Jerusalem.

Now, we have Advent week 4, and
we vault back to the beginning
story with Mary now, center stage

And pregnant and on a visit to her cousin, Elizabeth,
who is also pregnant.

Elizabeth is pregnant with John the Baptist and
Mary pregnant with Jesus.

So, taking a step back and looking at
the Advent texts as a whole,

we find that it has been
a progression backwards.

Advent's way of turning the world upside down,
one might say. (Pause)

Two things happen in our gospel today.

The in utero John recognizes the in utero Jesus
with Elizabeth's response to this joy and
then Mary's cry of resistance.

In this setting we come to recognize

the sounds and smell of Christmas Eve.

And if we are careful, if we sing a little louder
and dance a bit bolder, then we come into
the understanding about the
kind of reversal God has in mind for
the world and we invite
the words that come
from Mary's lips.

I mean, just think about it for a moment...
Luke takes time, in a patriarchal society,

Luke takes time to tell the stories of
an old woman who, we suppose, wanted
to be pregnant (Elizabeth) and

a young girl, who probably wanted to be pregnant,
but just not this soon (Mary)!

Luke takes the time to tell us how these
women's lives collided together.

Their paths collided and then unite
in quite wonderful ways.

Mary left home to seek sanctuary and comfort in
the home of her elder relative and Elizabeth,
who without an ounce of judgment

embraced her.

There wasn't any jealousy or anger between them.

No interrogation, not a

“You let yourself get pregnant, Mary!”

Or “How are you pregnant

while at your age, Elizabeth?”

There was not any of this.

Only the assurance that Elizabeth recognized

the signs in her body that told her

who Mary was, blessed, and she was given an

early glimpse of whom Mary was

carrying in her body.

Luke is careful to affirm to us that neither woman

was a victim to their circumstances.

Their roles were not passive or timid, but

poignant and prophetic.

Elizabeth mentors Mary according

to the wisdom of her age and by

recognizing Mary's blessedness and favor,

Mary replied with a song of praise

by interpreting her own blessedness and
favor with a hint of the way God is,
once again, entering into our world. (Pause)

In the midst of fear and uncertainty
about their futures, they embraced one another
as they came to know what kinds of
impact their children would have on
the world and the major roles
they would play in bringing
God's truth to the
generations. (Pause)

The mystery, for me, that surrounds
this scene is the mystery of knowing.

Did Elizabeth and Mary know?

Did they know who their baby boys
would grow up to be?

The answer is not entirely clear.

But what is clear is this: Mary and Elizabeth
put their lives on the line.

Neither entered into their calling in docile ways.

They accepted all the risks and

we are reminded of other women in the Bible
who have sung songs that have been
retold throughout the ages and how
they also put their lives on the line.

Miriam sang a song of resistance when God
delivered the oppressed people from Egypt.

The once barren Hannah sang a song of resistance
when she was afflicted by people in power.

Bold songs of God's good news
bursting into the world. (Pause)

Mary's song of resistance, the song we chanted
just a bit ago speaks of "Mary bursting with
God-news and dancing the song of
my Savior God.

God took one good look at me," Mary sang,
and proclaimed, "Look what happened -
I'm the most fortunate woman on earth!"

This translation from the Message
reminds us that Mary sang and danced
resistance against those who oppress people,
subjugate women, and belittle
God's blessing upon the low in status.

(Pause)

Mary's song began with looking upon herself
as God's servant and then quickly turned it
to prophecy.

Her son, "will be great, and will be called
the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God
will give to him the throne of David."

In a song of revolution she sings
the story of God's action promising
to turn the world around.

"God scattered the proud,
brought down the powerful,
lifted up the lowly,
filled the hungry,
sent the rich away empty."

All actions done in the past but
the actions also continue in the future.

It is the "already done" and the "not yet finished."

Throughout the ages God's people
have faced oppression and in the
face of oppression,

God's people have sung songs of resistance.

Yet, there is also a paradox here, too.

God's people have also been the oppressors.

We have enslaved and marginalized and
judged and failed to love and
lacked trust and stolen and
persecuted and slain others and
each other.

And when we have done so
then people have sung songs of resistance
against us. (2X)

(Pause)

In a moment, we will sit, perhaps reflect on
this sermon and Mary's song and
witness a dance of resistance.

That's really what it is, it is really what
we are a part of at St. Stephen.

Resistance from being lured away from God.

Resistance from closing our eyes
to injustices around us.

Resistance from taking the easy ways out.

Have we closed our ears to Mary's radical song?

I don't think so... No, not here.

We are not perfect but we are a people
who do not *just* speak good news
but we *sing* it.

Dance it.

And there's something quite
wonderful about that!

O Come, O Come Emmanuel.

You have done so because of the ends
to which Mary was willing to go.

A mother's Son, a Savior, strong because
your mother was strong.

And a world began to turn as God
entered into our lives... a world still turning

and it is that by this love we have
connections with each other and a willingness
to dance.

AMEN!