

Grace Lutheran Church, Uniondale, New York
Lutheran Church of the Epiphany~ Iglesia Luterana de la Epifanía, Hempstead, New York
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Fourth Sunday of Advent B – December 20, 2020

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16, Psalmody: Luke 1:47-55, Romans 16:25-27, Luke 1:26-38

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

C: AMEN!

“The angel Gabriel ...came to [Mary] ... and said, ‘Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.’ But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.” (Luke 1:26, 29.)

Think about that with me, if you will. The angel Gabriel came to Mary and gave her this strange message. And what was her response? She was perplexed. I looked for synonyms of “perplexed” and found the following words: puzzled, confused, mystified, confounded, stunned, baffled, thrown, bewildered, stumped, flummoxed, befuddled, disconcerted. Not one “scared” or “frightened” or “afraid” or “fearful” or “terrified” or “petrified” in the dozen descriptions of such a state of mind. Any or all of these descriptors probably would have been **my** response to an angelic visit with such a message. But Mary wasn’t even “anxious.”

Mary has been described as a poor, young, innocent girl. I myself have done so. But really. Really? She apparently **was** young and relatively poor. But she was self-assured and ready for a further explanation, a conversation – with the angel Gabriel. We could even say she was poised and composed.

So, providing further explanation,

The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your 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.” (1:30-37.)

Wow. Wow! Putting myself in Mary's place leaves me feeling astonished, staggered, astounded.

How would **you** respond to this message if you were to receive it? How would you have responded to this statement **as a young, single, betrothed, relatively poor woman?**

Well, here's Mary's response: "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." (1:38.) Here. Am. I. The. Servant. Of. The. Lord. I give you my life in obedience – but willingly, freely, readily, voluntarily.

Let it be with me according to your word. You're in charge of me, Lord; you're in charge of this situation you've created, Lord; you're in charge of my future, Lord; you're in charge of my entire life.

The Rev. Nancy Rockwell comments, in an on-line article from 2015 entitled "No More Lying About Mary:"

It is Mary's grace that has attracted God's attention. And what is this grace? It is what Luke shows us in her conversation and her actions – courage, boldness, grit, ringing convictions about justice. Not submissive meekness. Grace is not submission. And the power of God is never meek.

<https://www.patheos.com/blogs/biteintheapple/no-more-lying-about-mary/>

I'm not sure I agree with Pastor Rockwell about Mary not having been submissive to God's will. But she certainly **subordinated** her will, her plans for her life, her self-conception – which was sorely challenged by her community's response to her pregnancy – to God's will for all. And she most certainly did it in a grace-filled manner.

Then, in eight verses of Luke's Gospel not included in our readings today (1:39-46), we learn that Mary ran – "set out and went with haste" is the way Luke describes her journey – to be with that relative Elizabeth who Gabriel told her also was pregnant. Was Elizabeth joyous? Yes, but she also was somewhat ashamed, because she was a pregnant older woman who, with her priest husband, Zechariah, had not conceived a child during their many years of marriage, and they were "getting on in years" (Luke 1:7). They had lived through the years of shame in not producing an heir, and now when she should have stopped bearing children, she was carrying her first.

But Elizabeth was in good company. Of course, there was Sarah, who birthed Isaac when she was ninety years old and her husband Abraham was 100 years old (Gen.

17:17;21:1-7). And there was Hannah's late-life child Samuel finally born to her and her husband Elkanah after many years of her prayers and her pledge to give any son born to them to serve in the temple (1 Samuel 1).

Mary heard Gabriel's news and understood that a welcome home was available to her at this time when she would have to make huge adjustments mentally, physically and spiritually. Her situation might have felt somewhat like ours did in mid-March when we suddenly had to enter self-isolation because of the coronavirus. It was sudden, unfamiliar, unknown, and uncertain.

So Mary went to Elizabeth and Elizabeth blessed her. And Mary's response was the extraordinary testimony we have come to call "the Magnificat:"

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
 my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
 for you, Lord, have looked with favor on your lowly servant.
 From this day all generations will call me blessed:
 you, the Almighty, have done great things for me
 and holy is your name.
 You have mercy on those who fear you,
 from generation to generation.
 You have shown strength with your arm
 and scattered the proud in their conceit,
 casting down the mighty from their thrones
 and lifting up the lowly.
 You have filled the hungry with good things
 and sent the rich away empty.
 You have come to the aid of your servant Israel,
 to remember the promise of mercy,
 the promise made to our forbears,
 to Abraham and his children forever.

Luke 1:47-55.

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C: Amen