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## **Mary's Joy and Wonder**

The most difficult aspect of this Fourth Sunday of Advent is relating the story of a first century peasant girl to 21<sup>st</sup> century understanding. But in fact that is not the point. We gather to hear the Gospel story, the 'good news', of God's plan for us and it includes His coming in the most understandable of ways for EVERYONE.

In an earlier day Scripture was the roadmap of life. When Mary goes to visit Elizabeth the verbs in the story convey the movement, the urgency, and the joy of her journey: *Mary set out, went with haste, entered the house, and greeted Elizabeth.*

The 'sign' with some precedence is the leaping in the womb of Elizabeth's child. One familiar with Israel's scriptures knows that this is not the first time prenatal signs have occurred. Jacob and Esau struggled so fiercely in Rebekah's womb that she lamented; "*If it is to be this way, why do I live?*" a word only a Mom can appreciate. Elizabeth immediately interprets the movement of her unborn child.

Not only does the child 'leap' but Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit and prophecies. Elizabeth's being filled with the Holy Spirit alerts us

that what she says will come as an inspired prophetic utterance, the word of God. Her loud cry is the cry of the Spirit in song. Elizabeth's song is broken into four oracles of faith, oracles of understanding God's message to us.

The first oracle declares the blessedness of Mary and the child that will be born to her. Her oracle did not convey blessing on Mary but recognized that she was already blessed.

The second oracle takes the form of a question, but discloses more explicitly the identity of the child in Mary's womb. Her reference to Mary as "the mother of my Lord" is already a Christian confession, signaling that as with the rest of the birth narratives, Luke has told this part of his story in light of the entire story. The visit blesses Elizabeth.

The third oracle explains the meaning of the movement of the babe in her womb. It was a leap of joy. The angel promised Zechariah that he would have joy, and now joy has come to Elizabeth at the visitation of Mary. John has already begun to fulfill his calling as one who would declare the Lord's coming and prepare the way for him. Later, Jesus would rejoice that the Lord of heaven and earth who had hidden things from the wise had revealed them to infants!

The fourth oracle is a beatitude on Mary for her faith that the promise to her would be fulfilled. The oracle, therefore, recalls both the annunciation

to Mary and her humble response. Blessing always comes from trusting that God's Word will be fulfilled.

After Elizabeth's powerful introduction we hear the first message from God about the Savior who is coming...

*"My soul magnifies the Lord..."* sings Mary as she bears Christ to us, then, in her womb, in her prophetic longing for justice, and in the simplicity of her womanhood but there is something just as significant in her words, unadulterated joy. Mary is the exemplary believer of the Christian faith. She embodies the trust God expects from us in order to accomplish the Divine work in the world.

Mary is an archetype of faith --- the mother of believers --- in much the same way that Abraham is the father of a nation. Both launched out on a journey without maps, trusting God fully with no guarantees or contractual assurances. Faith and obedience paved their path.

Mary's glorious hymn rings through to our spirits today, speaking of ironic reversal, transforming her personal "Yes" into a universal cry FOR GOD TO BE GOD IN THE WORLD.

When Mary uses the past tense to refer to restructuring of the world , she reflects her conviction that all of this is an *accomplished fact*. God's full

and final deliverance of the world --- the revolution of Jesus, the vindication of the poor --- is already underway and stirring in her womb.

It is a stirring, like all stirrings, that will cause her joy, anxiety, anger, and heartbreak. It is also the Ultimate breakthrough of a new way of salvation that the peasant God-bearer believes on faith.

Who is Mary? Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, describes her as “she who literally makes a home for the Creator of all things, the strangest reality we can conceive, in her own body and in her own house, she whom we meet again in the Gospels struggling with the strangeness of her son, from the finding in the temple to the station at the cross.”

“*Mary did you know...*” sings pop artist Kenny Rogers in a special song of the season. It is a moving look into the heart of this one marked as “The God Bearer” for generations to come. Gabriel, the sentinel of God , paid first a visit to Zachariah, father of John the Baptist and then to the young woman, Mary, a special visit the result of which would be God’s appearance on earth. In the final powerful line of the popular song the lyric is “*did you know the sleeping child you’re holding is the great I AM?*” Do these words carry for you the image they carry for me?

Start in Genesis and read of this powerful God of Creation and then of Abraham and Moses and try to see this One as a ‘babe in a manger’. Try and

see this powerful and singular God as a human being nurtured and raised by someone just like you and me! Luke, the only Gentile in an otherwise all Jewish cast of New Testament writers, tells his story of faith as a story to all of those who ever found themselves on the outside looking in. Through Mary we know that with God there are no outsiders. To those who are leaving their church to start a new one on the basis of leaving a group out beware of God's message that we hear loud and clear through this special one named Mary. Not only is Luke a most vigorous champion of the outsider but Mary is his ideal, a woman, who would 'bear God' to the world.

You may see yourself as one who is insignificant in God's great plan. But I say to you on this morning, that thinking is of Satan himself. You are to carry God to the world in which you live. As Mary says, "My soul magnifies the Lord..." and becomes the first Christian witness, you and I are to proclaim to ALL PEOPLE this astounding Good News! Instead of building walls we are to be inviting those unlike us into this fellowship that God might change their lives forever as He changed Mary's.

Perhaps she can fathom the outcome of this revolution --- the manifestation of this great salvation in its fullness --- only NOW in her status as foremost of the saints , united with her Son in glory.

On this Christmas Eve afternoon give special thanks for this special one name Mary who answered affirmatively to the Lord's call to her and introduced us all to "God the Savior." You and I know the story...today if God is to be 'born' into the world it is through our lives, the lives of the Baptized that it will be so. Amen. .