

Today's Sermon

from St. Stephen's Episcopal Church

December 20, 2015

Advent 4C

Luke 1:39-55

Little Girl Blessed

Mary and the Revelation of GOD

—The Rev. Drew Downs

About Mary:

- She walks a long way without protection.
- She is young. I'm sure many of you know this already, but the Greek we translate as "virgin" means "girl". They used a more specific word for virgin in other contexts. So the gospel writers were more interested in her youthfulness --that she is not fully an adult--than anything else.
- She comes to this willingly. She was asked to do this and she said yes.

That she survives this pregnancy, this journey, to arrive at her cousin's house is a miracle. And what she finds when she gets there is another one.

Elizabeth's House

Mary's cousin is married to a priest: Zechariah (we sang his song last week--like we sang Mary's song, the Magnificat this week). And when they meet, we have this amazing moment: of John leaping in the womb and Elizabeth knowing that this really is from GOD. Three times Elizabeth declares Mary blessed.

This is no coincidence, of course, that Elizabeth is declaring a blessing - like a priest. She isn't one, but she does it. She is filled with the holy spirit and shouts the blessing.

Here, to this young woman, this girl, her cousin, who, unlike all those unwed mothers who didn't survive, she lives. She certainly is blessed. Blessed among women, by a woman.

And Mary responds to the moment with a song. A gorgeous song about GOD and who GOD loves.

It is also a rebellious and terrifying song--declaring that she is proof of GOD's blessing. Proof of who GOD truly loves: the lowliest of servants. She of *no stature, not just low stature, no stature. The dead walking, a ghost to the world. She is blessed by GOD to live to bear the child of GOD.*

BVM

Mary isn't dead. The most important part of this story is right in front of our faces, but we can hardly see it. Mary is not dead. She is alive.

Mary, a young woman (a girl really) unwed, pregnant, travelling alone across miles and miles, from the north to the south to see her cousin; this little one is alive.

It is so obvious, really. She has to live for the story, for Jesus to be born. She has to live. And we see her faithfulness and her beauty and we know that she is blessed among women. We even refer to her with a title. She isn't just Mary, but she is the Blessed Virgin Mary. People even shorten it with an acronym. BVM-Blessed Virgin Mary.

That she is not dead is a natural part of the story.

But it is anything but the natural occurrence of one in her condition.

There's Something About Mary

Here are a few things we need to remember. You've heard these things before.

About young women:

- All women were considered property. First of a father, then a husband.
- Unwed mothers are not only damaged goods, but unprotected, and considered guilty of sin.
- A pregnant woman with no husband would likely be stoned to death.

The lowliest of people - she is going to be remembered forever as the blessed one.

All these later generations will have to deal with that truth: that GOD loves her. The one all the good church goers are told by their pastors to condemn, to cast stones upon her because of her sin. She. She is blessed. Favored among women. A girl. Loved, blessed, at the top.

She is the proof of GOD. Proof of who GOD loves and how GOD loves the people. This is what GOD does. We can see this in what GOD has done. In mercy. In strength. In scattering the proud. GOD has brought down kings in their pride and lifted shepherds to the throne. GOD fed the hungry and deprived the wealthy. And GOD even stuck with Israel, even when they didn't deserve it.

This is GOD! she sings. GOD doesn't bless in earthly riches. GOD blesses in mercy. Not in wealth, but in food. Not in power, but in being raised out of the dirt. The dead to the world, alive, loved by GOD.

She lives because of who GOD is - **and** not because of who we are.

The Magnificat

This is a beautiful song. Mary's Song: the Magnificat. And going to church long enough, it sounds as if it were the stuff we want to hear. But it is, as C.S. Lewis called "a terrible song." This is a play on the Latin root, meaning "dreadful, frightful, fearsome". A song that doesn't allow us to walk away unmoved, unprovoked, unscathed. For few among us are a girl like Mary, bearing the utterly true likeness and favor of GOD. And none of us is such a one bearing the literal incarnate GOD in our wombs!

This is who is blessed: the lowliest servant. The ghost, the nobody. It is a fearsome song to hear this blessed girl say that she is blessed in her poverty and powerlessness. That she **knows who GOD blesses**. *And so few of us feel so blessed.*

There is power in being blessed by GOD. But it isn't for the powerful, but the powerless. GOD fills them with power and draws the power from power-full.

Today, we get Mary to show us the way to GOD;

to reveal the nature of GOD that came, is coming, will come again. And we will give thanks, praising GOD for the girl who lived, the lowliest who bellows with the very might of GOD what the powerful are too afraid to say, let alone sing. Yes, she is blessed among women, among the spirit-empowered rogue priests, proclaiming the living GOD in our midst without the sanction of the church, in spite of all our rules and prohibitions; all our prejudices and expectations.

We praise the girl, Mary, forever immortalized as the bearer of GOD, the one who was chosen, blessed, and raised above every other for she helps us see how lowly **we** are, how much **we** need GOD's mercy, how much **our** world needs redeeming. How blessed we are to be alive and able to proclaim to our families and friends and these rogue priests around us what GOD is doing for us; how GOD is mercy and love and hope. How blessed we are to be blessed by a GOD who redeems us even from our lowliness.

