

MARY'S SONG CARRIES ON A TRADITION

4 Advent – C December 23, 2018

Luke 1:39-55

One of the great privileges of serving this congregation lies in our ability and honor to sing heartily and make wonderful music in response to our wonder at all God has done for us.

Mary's song, *The Magnificat*, sung as a canticle and read in its context in Luke's gospel, is a good lead-in to the spoken word and preaches the Good News beautifully and succinctly. And it is part of the larger songbook that is the gospel of Luke: with Zechariah, Mary, the Angels, and Simeon all singing great praises of what God has done.

We speak of what God has done because it is a credible predictor of what God can and will do from this point forward. For the Jewish people, part of the celebration of any festival is to recall the marvelous acts that God has performed or completed, even as the celebration is brought into the present context through the invocation of a personal pronoun: for *me*, for *us* (“*for the Mighty One has done great things for me*”). God's acting in the past reminds us that God is acting now and will continue to make his presence known in the time to come. Hope for the present and for the future comes by evidence of what God *has done*.

As God's people getting ready to celebrate Jesus' birth in a few days, we continue the tradition of sharing the Good News of what God *has done for us*, as we listen to the story of *God-with-us in the birth of a Savior* with eagerness and anticipation, as if we were hearing it for the first time.

As we ponder how God will make new things happen in our lives, in our families, in this Emmanuel congregation, in the Outer Banks, and in our world, we wait with open hearts to receive and with open hands to share; following the example of Mary, Elizabeth, and our other ancestors in the faith.

They will all be with us as we circle the Table this morning: the saints who have been our past, who inform our present, and who will continue to make Christ known as we pass on the faith we have received. Their witness informs our witness.

Mary understood that. By her ancestry she recalled the God who lifts up the lowly and remembers those who are in need. No doubt she recalled the song of Hannah in the Hebrew Scriptures who, like Elizabeth in the Gospel, had previously been unable to conceive; yet, by the grace of God bore a son. Hannah's son Samuel would grow up to become the priest who anointed David as king of Israel. Elizabeth's son John would be the forerunner for the Son of God, the King of Kings.

So Mary sings a song of joy and hope, even in the midst of being still being stunned by the news of her own pregnancy, amazed by the pregnancy of her cousin Elizabeth, and humbled by the knowledge that, through Elizabeth and Mary, *the world is about to turn*, as this morning's canticle proclaims. History is happening, and they have the privilege of occupying a front-row seat (or perhaps better-stated: they have supporting roles in God's salvation history). As we will see, Mary will teach her son well, for the good news she now proclaims is the very same good news we will hear from Jesus when he first sets out in his ministry, proclaiming: “*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*” [Luke 4:18-19]

It is still an appropriate time to proclaim Good News: release to the captives, freeing the oppressed, and proclaiming God's favor. Now, more than ever, we need to hear about and experience the unconditional love of God. The kingdoms of this world are shaking. In the midst of prosperity and technology and all that humans can accomplish, we are still visited by brokenness daily. We know our own shortcomings and we have our personal hurts; yet, painful as they are, they are but the tip of the iceberg as we look around our world. We need to see, hear, and feel good news.

It is *to this age* that the good news comes again, singing a new song of God's mercy and compassion against the noises that try to fill us with fear, anger, and despair; or overzealous pride, arrogance and greed, depending on the voice of the moment. The Good News confronts the powers of this world to remind us that God is merciful, God is love, and God is reaching out to us.

We come together in this place to hear the story because God has brought us together and placed us in the story. We are church to be fed with the word and the sacraments so that we can go forth to make that story real and meaningful for those whose lives intersect with ours. It is a holy calling and a sacred trust, as we proclaim what God has done *for us* and what God can do *through us* and *for the world*. So hear the story, live it, and share it. For God is bringing—to us, and to those around us—good news of great joy. Amen.