

4th Sunday of Advent

Advent Candle Lighting

Before I was born the Lord called me. In the shadow of his hand he hid me. Today we light the fourth candle, the candle of love

We light this candle to remember God's love for all people and all of creation. God loves us into being and enfolds us safely forever.

God is love. Whoever lives in love, lives in God and God in her/and God in him. Let us love others as God loves us.

Opening Prayers

Gracious and loving God, may we find you in our midst and may we receive your words of grace today. If we are fearful, move us to confidence. If we are weary, offer us rest. If we are empty, fill us with hope. Be with us, changing hearts and minds, urging us to join your work of love and transformation. We pray in the name of the One who is coming, Jesus the Christ. **Amen**

“Do not be afraid,” said Gabriel, surprising Mary and confronting her with the decision of her life. “Do not be afraid, God is with you.”

The year 2020 has confronted many of us with life-changing circumstances and decisions. We know fear from the inside out.

We recognize our fears and we hear God calling “Do not be afraid”

Our God, who has been with the people since the beginning, is with us now offering grace that is more than we can ask or imagine. God's love frees us from the past, and helps us move forward into a new future. Let us thank God-with-Us, Emmanuel, for faithful love. **Amen.**

Hymn The Angel Gabriel from heaven came

Readings Luke 1: 46-55 Mary's Song of Praise

Reflection

Who wants to be Mary? If you have ever asked a group of children this question, as you were preparing a Nativity play, you know that usually lots of hands are eagerly raised, sometimes not only of girls but boys too! Everybody wants to be Mary. But did Mary want to be Mary? From the passage

immediately preceding Mary's song of praise we would not be wrong to assume that Mary may not have been very keen to be Mary. After the visit from the angel Gabriel, Mary was, depending on the Bible translation, "much perplexed" (NRSV), "greatly troubled" (NIV), "thoroughly shaken" (The Message) or "confused and disturbed" (NLT).

Who can blame her that she is confused and does ask a question or two before she accepts her role. But she does! And that is where we pick up the story today, in which she courageously sings a beautiful poetic and revolutionary song: the so-called Magnificat.

And so, every year in our Advent journey to Christmas, we meet Mary, not only as a young woman who accepts the role she has been given, not only as the mother-to-be of Jesus who would bring hope to a weary world, but also as a courageous woman who announced that a great revolution was going to take place...or rather, that a great revolution – a transformation of hearts and minds - had already happened.

"God has brought down the mighty from their thrones and lifted up the lowly," Mary sings. Those are revolutionary words, and they are spoken as if it already has happened.

We do not often think of Mary, the mother of Jesus, as subversive, a protester, a revolutionary! But she was! The picture on many Christmas cards of Mary dressed in robes as if preparing Jesus for his throne is deceiving. Similarly, the picture of a saintly, modest Mary is false, or at least very questionable, given the protest song she sang. No, Mary was a strong woman with character, not accepting the situation that she and her people were suffering as oppressed people. Mary's song, the Magnificat, as subversive statement is no doubt fully in character with her. And sitting on her lap, Jesus must have been schooled in protest from a very young age! "God has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich empty away!" You could imagine that Mary and Elizabeth have this meeting in which they both dream of a brighter tomorrow for the child they each carry in their womb. Actually, they imagine that the change for the better has already

happened for Mary is pregnant with God's future, In other words, it is the beginning of the end for the unjust worldly rulers. Yes, she feels that the revolution has started with her! Perhaps we can say that over the past 2000 years we have seen a gradual fulfilment of the revolutionary words of Mary's song. *"The last 2000 years have seen the radical awakening of human consciousness to what Mary expressed in her song; that the world should be organized around the needs of the lowly, not the desires of the privileged. All revolutions have been about this, one way or another."* While that is an interesting observation, I am thinking: look at our world, look at the gap between rich and poor (and the pandemic has even more exposed the massive inequalities), look at our capitalist, free market economy, look at the policies of governments....do they really serve the poor? Well, whether they manage to do so or not, one thing is for sure, and which is relatively new in history: governments, national and international organizations, etc recognize that they must justify their agenda in terms of the needs of the poor. If not, they are bound to face criticism or support may be withdrawn from them. If it is true that all the great revolutions in history occurred in the first instance in the hearts and minds of people, then what about this revolution announced by Mary, to be named by Jesus as the Kingdom of God? That was a revolution that came in the person of Jesus who made visible in his life and teaching God's non-violent, non-cooperation with rulers and systems motivated by greed, ambition and power. Jesus of Nazareth, son of Mary, a nobody in the eyes of the world he was born in, revealed the power of God to resist peacefully the powers that are contrary to God's will and purpose....and now it is *our* calling to cooperate with God's purposes, God's vision for a just and peaceful world. May God's love rule our lives and let us truly believe that this baby born in Bethlehem *can* change the world...or rather, *has* changed the world!

Hymn

When out of poverty is born

Prayers of Intercession

We need our world upside down, or right side up. We need transformation of hearts and minds, to emancipate ourselves from mental slavery and imagine that a different world is really possible. We need a whole new set of values to counter the inequality and injustice in our society and in the world....

And so we pray, O God, humble the powerful and exalt the humble; Fill the hungry with good things and keep the satisfied from taking more. Give us the wisdom to let the Christ child lead us into a world of justice and love and into a life of joy of service and simplicity.

Holy God, we need to remember that how things are now is not how they should be and always will be. We need to remember that your kingdom has come, is already made visible in many acts of kindness, sacrifice, peace-making, and that the time will come when it fills the world with justice and love. And so we pray:

for your coming to those around the world whose poverty, pain, trauma and grief make your kingdom feel like an illusion.
for your coming to those in our community who long to see your love and justice expressed through faithful advocacy and action

for your coming to those who seek to make a difference while juggling the needs of themselves and their families

for your coming to us, who long to know you more and to live as citizens of your kingdom....And we pray together, OUR FATHER

Offering and Dedication

We pray, O God, accept these gifts of our hearts and hands. May they be multiplied and magnified to accomplish your work of love in the world, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Hymn

Tell out my soul

Blessing

Rejoice, give thanks, for God's promises are firm and God's mercy is sure....And may the peace of God in Christ guard your hearts and minds, today and forever. Amen.