

Holy Trinity Sunningdale  
Sunday 22 December, 2024 – 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent  
Readings – Luke 1:39-56 & Psalm 89:1-8

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent we were watching, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday, we were waiting, 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday, we were working and today, the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday, we are worshipping – finally, I think we are doing exactly what is expected of us in church!

Our Gospel reading is the story of two pregnant women, Mary and Elizabeth, Mary, pregnant with baby Jesus and Elizabeth, pregnant with John.

One aspect of Jesus' life that is easily overlooked is how many of his most important events happened on the road. The Son of God entered our world in Bethlehem, far from his family home in Nazareth and we cannot even calculate the distance from his heavenly home. Even before he was born, while he was still in Mary's womb, Mary made the arduous journey of about 80 miles on foot to see Elizabeth after she found out from the angel she was carrying God's Son.

Verses 26 – 38 of Luke 1 tells of the visit of Angel Gabriel to Mary to declare the coming of Jesus, the fulfilment of God's promise. Mary was told that she was going to give birth to the Son of the Most High and to call him Jesus.

Mary was greatly troubled by the words of the angel and asked, "How will this be? To give a glimpse of what was possible with God, the angel told her the story of her close relative, Elizabeth, who was miraculously pregnant in her old age.

Mary, probably went to Elizabeth to find someone to talk with. Maybe she needed reassurance from her older, wiser relative who had also experienced a similar miracle. We can only imagine what it must have been like for Mary surrounded by suspicion, hard words and looks from critical neighbours and friends who see her swollen belly as a symbol of her faithlessness to the covenant and not its fulfilment.

Within her womb is Jesus, still only an embryo, but, "When Elizabeth heard Mary's greetings, the baby leaped in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit." Elizabeth recognised Mary as faithful and obedient and John dances in the womb! Elizabeth calls down a blessing on Mary for her obedience to the Lord and Mary responded with a song called the Magnificat – an expectant song of glory, a song of hope.

What we see clearly in this passage is the sparks of holy activity, of joy meeting joy. A troubled Mary hurried to find Elizabeth, at her greetings, the unborn baby in Elizabeth's womb jumped for joy, the exclamation of blessing from Elizabeth followed by Mary's song of glory and hope. These two women in awe and wonder witnessing to each other the goodness of God in their lives, calling out blessings, life and favour joyfully over each other.

This is worship - God calling out joy in our hearts as we see and witness his loving kindness in our lives.

The song of Mary is also a song of political faith. In recent history, a man named Hitler founded a cruel empire which he said would last a thousand years. It lasted just 12!

The song of Mary is a celebration of God as the power who challenges power. It is a celebration of the God who shows strength of arm, who scatters the proud, who cast down the mighty, who banishes the rich from the table of plenty, a champion of the poor, the oppressed and the marginalised.

And the song of Mary calls us to choose sides. Are we on the side of mercy, do we identify with the lowly? It is so tempting to believe that we will be more secure if we follow the powerful. It feels risky to follow the God of the vulnerable. Yet at this season of Advent, we are called to reflect on the power of a young mother and her child, a child we call Lord because he embodies the power of powerlessness.

Catholic theologian, Ronald Rohlheiser writes, "The Magnificat is the ultimate prayer of hope" Our lives leap for joy at the impending Christmas event because of the gift of hope which the baby in the manger brings to our lives. There is a hopefulness about life because of Christ. No matter the circumstances in which we find ourselves, there can be hope because of Christ. Hope that says somehow we will be delivered, rescued, or given the courage and strength to endure. In the face of injustice, corruption, exploitation that seem to reign in the world today, the hope of Christmas says no matter how desperate life seems, no matter how much hurt, brokenness, and alienation there is, because of Jesus there is hope.

Our hearts leap for joy this season because with God, all things are possible. Our hearts leap for joy because of the gift of the baby born in the manger who brings hope into our troubled lives.

St. Augustine said that, in Christ, each of us is Mary to some Elizabeth; so too, each of us is an Elizabeth to some Mary. Do you hear in the word of God the joyful promises made time and again to each of us? Do we listen closely to hear God's voice of joyful promise? Did you hear it in the Psalm and Gospel readings of today? Do you hear the promise made to Mary, Elizabeth and to us?

On Saturday 14<sup>th</sup>, we held our amazing Christmas concert here at Holy Trinity. I wonder how many came like me hoping to celebrate God's present and coming glory even when I know my story is still unfinished. When, Whitney Huston's One Wish for Christmas was sung so beautifully, God filled my heart with a song of his faithful kindness with the words, "I would pray for hope and unity on Christmas day. If I had one wish for Christmas, there will be joy and peace here on earth!"

Let us rejoice today in God's presence with us. Let us call to mind the greatness of God and his great love for us. This Advent, as we worship, we pray for a reawakened wonder at the way the God of glory loves us. Amen.

Dolapo Ogunbawo