

The One of Peace

Psalm 80: 1-7

Micah 5: 2-5a

Luke 1: 39-55

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Advent 4 Candle lighting liturgy by Rev. Amy C. Wake

<https://youngclergywomen.org/an-advent-candlelighting-liturgy/>

Reader: "In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David" (Luke 2:1,3-4).

Reader: Today we remember Joseph, worn-out traveler and worried husband, doing what was necessary for the sake of his family, the burden of poverty stifling his hope in the promise of God. There was no room for him, yet he knows to whom he belongs.

People: Today we give thanks for the Josephs among us, migrating far from home when there is no choice, fiercely devoted to the ones they love, unwavering in their belief that there is room for all in the kin-dom of God.

Reader: On this fourth Sunday of Advent, we light this candle as a symbol of Joseph, who knocks at the door, ready to take his place among royalty.

Psalm 80: 1-7

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock! You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh. Stir up your might and come to save us! Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved. O Lord God of hosts, how long will you be angry with your people's prayers? You have fed them with the bread of tears and given them tears to drink in full measure. You make us the scorn of our neighbors; our enemies laugh among themselves. Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

Micah 5: 2-5a

But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has brought forth; then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel. And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth; and he shall be the one of peace.

Luke 1: 39-55

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord." And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he 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 away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever." And Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

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One of the songs I hear most often these days is, 'Mary, Did You Know?' and almost as much as I hear the song, I hear the theologically sarcastic retort, "Of course she knew. Go read the Gospel of Luke." The hymn asks if Mary knew some of the specific things that Jesus would grow up to do someday—walk on water, save our sons and daughters, give sight to a blind man and calm a storm with his hand. The hymn asks if Mary knew that her baby boy is the Lord of all creation; that by him the deaf will hear, the lame will leap, and the dumb will sing praises. So yes, Mary knew in the general sense just who her son would be, God Incarnate, the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God who will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there would be no end, but the details, those wonderful, amazing, astonishing, life changing and life giving details were not known. Even as his mother, Mary had to watch it all unfold just as everyone else in Jesus' life had to do.

The controversy around this hymn got me thinking about other hymns written about Mary, as each of them celebrate a meek and mild maiden. They describe a lowly troubled, fearful woman whose head remains bowed in reverence.

The Advent hymn, 'Long Ago, Prophets Knew,' calls us to hail Mary, who "Though afraid, she believed, she obeyed. In her womb, God is laid till the time of expected, nurtured and protected. The writer of 'The Angel Gabriel from Heaven Came,' saw her as "lowly maiden Mary, Most highly favored Mary", who although it troubled her to hear the angel's message, "meekly bowed her head"; "To me be as it pleases God," she said. And on Christmas Eve, many will sing 'Mary was that mother mild, Jesus Christ her little child,' once in Royal David's city.

These hymns and other hymns about Mary present a gentle, mild, tender and faithful young woman. And this is good, this image we have is how we want to see the mother of God Incarnate. The Prince of Peace is born to a mother who radiates peace. The Light of the World is born to a mother who reflects the light of God. The Great I Am is born to a mother who is humble.

Yet that is not the whole truth. The songs written about Mary do not truly sound like the song that Mary sings about herself, about God's astounding plan that she would be the mother of

the Christ child. Her song, the Magnificat, is a “yes,” to God, an enthusiastic “yes.” Her words are not gentle, meek, mild, nor anxious and tentative. They are a strong and joyful prophetic witness that celebrates her own unique role in the incarnate life of Jesus Christ, in the revelation of God’s plan of renewal, reconciliation and redemption, of mercy and memory, as she will nurture, birth and raise the One who is coming to realign the world.

The mother of the Prince of Peace knows that her child, her baby boy, will carry out the ancient promises of God to God’s people. He will be the One of Peace tending to those who have fed on the bread of tears given to them to drink in full measure so that they shall instead live secure. He will be the One to scatter the proud in the thoughts of their hearts, to upend the powerful from their thrones, to lift up the lowly, to be hope for the vulnerable and the oppressed. He will fill the hungry with good things and send the rich away empty. The mother of the One of Peace gracefully and actively celebrates her role as her own life magnifies God. She is able to see what is happening now, and for generations to come. She boldly receives and embraces God’s call on her life with joy. Mary is even able to balance a perspective of herself as God’s servant as she also eagerly recognizes her new forever status as blessed.

Mary’s song reminds us that faith, that trust in God’s call and promises, is just as much about anticipation as it is about response. Mary’s song and Advent both call us to look forward to the fulfillment and the fruition of God’s promises as we actively find ways to improve the world as we do the work for which we were created. That faith trusts in God’s future while at the same time insists on making God’s future present for all people. Writer Sonja Corbitt says that “the Magnificat invites every Christian, through Jesus, to see the Holy Spirit in the rare expression of the woman from whose flesh our Savior took his own. The Magnificat is Mary in her own words. It inspires study and imitation of the scriptures by presenting Mary as a gift and invitation, a mother of prayer and listening for all.”

On this fourth Sunday in Advent we remember Mary and Elizabeth, two blessed women who know first-hand what it feels like to be the lowly who are lifted up, and what it is to eagerly accept God’s unique and personal calling that does not fit easily into their world as they see the promises of Christmas come true in their own lives. Mary and Elizabeth, in whom God has found favor, return that favor. Even though they cannot yet grasp the fullness of that favor, they know enough to act on it — and they can hardly wait to do so.

On this fourth Sunday in Advent we remember Mary and Joseph together migrating from home with no choice, and we remember their fierce devotion to loved ones and the belief that there is room for all in God’s kingdom. There was no room for them, yet they knew to whom they belonged. We remember God’s ancient promise that the Messiah would come from the family line of David as Joseph and Mary begin a journey to Bethlehem and continue a journey shared for the birth, the life, of the One of Peace.

On this fourth Sunday of Advent, what is the song you sing? How does your spirit rejoice in God our Savior, and in the coming of the Christ child? Amen.