

The Fourth Sunday of Advent
December 20, 2015
Year C

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Micah 5:2-5a
Hebrews 10:5-10
Luke 1:39-55

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

This is Mary's Sunday. She is pregnant, but still early, and she visits her cousin Elizabeth, who is in her last trimester with the baby who will turn out to be John the Baptist. Elizabeth is given a supernatural insight into the identity of the baby in Mary's womb. She exclaims, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb," thus completing the composition of the Ave Maria that was started by the angel Gabriel when he first greeted Mary at the Annunciation saying, "Hail, Mary, full of grace." (This song was a two-person collaboration!)

Important as Mary is, the three readings taken together are about the Messiah. In the First reading, the prophet Micah says that the little town of Bethlehem will be the place where the Messiah will be born, saying, "from you shall come forth ... one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. . . 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."

The reading from Hebrews offers a theological consideration of the relationship of the coming of the Messiah to the cult of burnt sacrifices in the Temple. The reading says that the God is replacing the cult of animal sacrifice with the Incarnation as the way the God and human beings will connect. ". . . when Christ came into the world, he said, 'Sacrifices

and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure.” That is the man who is God comes to earth in place of all the sacrifices. His life given is for the life of the world and will reconcile all the human race with God.

And this will happen next Friday. So what do we do about it? What is our response to this prophecy in Micah, to the theological explanation in Hebrews, and to the experience of the two pregnant women recorded in Luke?

We respond to the prophecy with hope and anticipation. We keep our eyes peeled for signs of the Promised One. We look for evidence that God is working God’s purpose out. We practice seeing good in the people around us, seeking Christ in all persons. We see how God provides for our needs and takes care of us as a shepherd cares for the sheep.

We respond to the theological interpretation of Hebrews by acknowledging that nothing we can do can ever bring us to God. God has no need of anything we can offer. The only gift that God cares about is the gift of our hearts. God does not want or need our things; God wants us. And God shows us this deep desire by coming to us. God enters our human, everyday lives and lives among us. We learn to see every detail of each day as a sacrament of the presence of God.

Mary’s response to Elizabeth’s outburst is to sing a song. The Magnificat is a beautiful hymn that is similar to the Song of Hannah that we heard a few weeks ago. It speaks with joy and amazement at how God reverses the natural order of society. The poor are raised up and the rich cast down, the hungry are fed while the well off go hungry, and so on. And the Creator of the universe becomes a baby, so that all the children of Adam and Eve may become divine. In response, we, too, raise our voices in praise, in song, in rejoicing.

We revel with our friends and families. We spread cheer as best we can. We share light in a dark world.

Yet none of this would have happened without Mary saying yes when the Archangel flamed his outrageous announcement to her. "Let it be to me according to your word."

So today as we approach the day of God's arrival in our midst we remember Mary especially. Her story teaches us much about how God wants to live with all of us. First, although God is all powerful and can do anything God wants, God chooses to work through human beings. Simply saving us by divine decree was an option; God have just saved us. But God wants a close personal relationship with each of us. God comes among us as another human. And to be fully human, God has to start as fetus in a woman's womb. So God needs to find a woman who is willing to provide this human birth. Nor will God force anyone to do anything, so archangel has to ask. (Some have questioned whether was the first woman, the archangel had approached, or just the first that said, "Yes." Maybe Gabriel had be asking Jewish women for centuries.) The greatest miracle of all is that Mary, under no coercion, totally freely, said yes. She was willing to be the mother that God needed to fulfill God's purpose of love. So we, too, may find a messenger of God asking us to do something odd, unexpected, dangerous, or frightening. We will always be able to say "No." We always get to say "Yes."

Through the centuries, Mary has been a symbol of the Church and of the faith of all Christians. Like Mary, we, the Church, are asked to make ourselves available to God so that God can use us in expressing God's love for the world. God invites us to allow Christ to grow in us and in the fullness of time to bring God forth into the world so that all may experience the love of God directly for themselves. Mary ask us here at St. Michael's, are you willing to

be filled with God, so that you may bear the Christ for all of Litchfield and the northwest corner? Will you allow the Holy Spirit to overshadow you? Are you willing to be counter-cultural so that the low may be lifted high and hungry fed even at the cost of bringing down some of the rich and proud?

So we listen to the words of the prophet Micah and respond with hope. We hear the theology of Hebrews and understand that although we cannot do anything make God love us, God invites us to work with God and be part of the adventure of saving the world. And with Mary, we hear God's invitation to share in that adventure and we say, "Yes." We say, "Let it be." We say, "Amen."