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Advent 4C 2018

St. Thomas's Episcopal Church

In the name of the Creator, Sustainer and Redeemer...Amen

In our Gospel reading for today we are told that God chooses Mary to be the mother of Jesus. She is an unlikely heroine. Mary was a Jew that lived under Roman occupation. She was from Nazareth in Galilee, a place with no political power. Mary was a member of the peasant class, who struggled to make a living through agriculture and small businesses like carpentry... The peasant class made up 90 percent of the population and they bore the burden of supporting the state **and** the privileged class. Their lives were hard, and they also had to pay taxes to Rome, to the tyrant Herod the Great, and to the temple.

And Mary, this unlikely woman who is going to give birth to God incarnate, knows that this birth has the potential to change the world. When she goes to her cousin Elizabeth's house...before she could share her news about her pregnancy...**THE** baby in Elizabeth's womb (John the Baptist) moved. Elizabeth exclaims that Mary is blessed and so is the fruit of her womb. Mary's response is called the Magnificat or song of Mary. "Magnificat," takes its name from the first word of the Latin translation of this song of praise because Mary says, "My soul *magnifies* the Lord."

In her declaration Mary boldly proclaims her belief that God will change the world through the child she is carrying. "You, O God, have shown strength with your arm, and scattered the proud in their conceit, you have deposed the mighty from their thrones and raised the lowly to high places. You have filled the hungry with good things while you have sent the rich away empty."

Mary is not meek, nor is she mild. She's a revolutionary calling for justice. She has no fear of advocating for a world that is exactly the opposite of the one she knows. She is ready for the world to be upended and she expects that to happen through the birth of her own child.

The story of Mary is a story of being chosen by God to participate in God's work of salvation, liberation, and reconciliation. Mary is the one who bears the child through whom... and in whom... God is revealed to humanity. Mary announces that her story is God's blessing ...through her to bear God's Son. It is a part of the ongoing drama of God's activity in the world. This casts Mary as a prophet, one who boldly interprets her experience through God and God's history.

Mary's song prepares us for Jesus. In him the lowly are lifted. In him God's mercy extends from generation to generation. So, let us magnify the Lord with Mary, and let us exalt God's name together! Mary's song of hope is a joyful one for those who are lowly, humble and humiliated, and who are the least and the last. Even for these people there is good news—the future Mary looked forward to is a vision of the restoration of the whole human family.

Mary's song is sometimes called the "Great Reversal:" the great change in position that God will accomplish through the sending of God's child. The status quo will no longer be accepted. Those previously looked down on will become something new – something other than they were. This is just the opposite, just the reverse, of the way the world sees things. God will turn the power structures upside down.

Mary reminds us that God cares deeply about the human condition. God chose a powerless, nondescript young woman to bear God's child. God chose to be with marginalized people, with poor and weak people, with people who were humble and forgotten.

Mary reminds us that God sees the dignity and worth of every human being, even those who are not recognized as worthy and dignified in the world. **Mary** reminds us that God shows up in unexpected places. **Mary** reminds us of the faithful and compassionate love of God.

I love that in Advent we are waiting for the birth of Jesus, because that revolutionary act of God's love in becoming vulnerable and human is the heart of our faith. And the heart of Advent. Look, even before Jesus was born, his mother was proclaiming her revolutionary politics and calling for an entire oppressive system to be overthrown. This Advent, more than any other I can remember, I am longing for God's justice and peace in the world. I join Mary and all of you in believing that the world can be better than it is... and in working to make that happen. The good news does not just reside in Mary it also resides in us. The Song of Mary shows us that the ordinary is not ordinary at all. The good news is found in **US**— as individuals and as Christian community.

In Advent we sing because we look forward to something better than the violence and suffering and injustice all around us. We look forward to the kindness and generosity and compassion of our God being fulfilled for all the peoples of the world. We sing because we look forward to "peace and joy which is the heart and soul of our faith and religion. We sing because of the good news that Jesus will enter the world to unequivocally and definitively set everything right and to make all things new. And we sing because God's light will enter the world. Our song is a song of hope.

Our call is to be as bold as Mary in identifying injustice and fighting against it. To be loud revolutionaries calling for justice. To answer whatever call we hear from God, because that call will always be for a better, more just world for everyone.

While there was only one Mary, only one mother of Jesus...could there be something in all of this for us?

My siblings if an ordinary woman can give birth to God incarnate, then what might we be empowered to do?

As we make our way to Christmas let us dwell in the excitement and the possibility of what God is doing in our lives – staying with us, empowering us to up-end the world, and calling us to recognize our own and others' sacred worth. May we, with Mary, rejoice in God our Savior.