Mary and Elizabeth

Advent 4B

St Thomas’s Church 2107

When I was 7, my most favoritest Christmas present was

the littlest one of all.

It was the mood ring hiding in the toe of my Christmas stocking.

Some of you may remember mood rings: they were unpretentious, tinny things

with a “stone” of sorts that changed colors depending on the mood of the wearer.

Blue was happy and peaceful. Red was mad. Green was sad. Purple was changing weather.

I wore it everywhere and guess what? it actually worked. At least for awhile.

My mood ring came to mind reading about Mary today.

Mary is a bit like my mood ring –

how we see her indicates the color of the times

and the culture’s attitudes toward women.

By tradition we understand Mary to be an inconsequential, socially invisible teen

from a small backwater town.

In truth according to scripture, we actually KNOW nothing about her.

We dress her, figuratively speaking, in different cultural clothing

in accordance with the shift in cultural mood.

When I was 7, Mary was blue: gentle, obedient,

adoring of the God who favored her,

and apparently quite comfortable in the presence of a visiting angel

and passively accepting of God’s will for her.

This version of Mary worked – for awhile.

By the time my daughter was 7, this version of Mary

was rejected in some places – and replaced.

I remember seeing a life-size outdoor Christmas crèche ablaze with light that year

with Mary clothed in RED. Seemed appropriate

In the age of civil rights marches, and the rise feminist and liberation theologies.

This Mary was no longer gentle and passive.

She was seen as a strong, courageous woman

who actively, fearlessly strode into this mysterious, inexplicable visitation

from an angel claiming to be God’s divine representative

announcing the impossibility that she, a virgin, would bear a son.

Here I am; let it be with me according to your word.

Now, this Advent, I heard a sermon casting Mary in yet another costume,

perhaps a purple robe signifying the changing weather

of deeply ingrained attitudes towards women.

In an age of rampant sexual misconduct and harassment,

the question the preacher raised was this: “was Mary harassed? assaulted?

The answer to her question was no.

Mary, the story tells us, was “perplexed”

and she “pondered” evidently being given – and taking –

time to wonder what might be going on here

and the opportunity to choose to say yes or no.

Only after taking time did she give her assent to God’s call.

Of course all of this is pure projection.

And notice, while we are busy rethinking who Mary might have been,

Mary is only thinking about God and who God is.

What’s important about Mary is not the WHO but the WHAT about her.

Focusing on the WHO of Mary (much of which we’ll never really know)

we risk overlooking the WHAT she and God are doing here.

We risk overlooking what God has been up to from the time of Abraham

to the amazing event we are about to celebrate tonight,

the unpretentious birth of a baby who would turn the world upside down,

the unexpected gift given us not in a Christmas stocking but in a food trough.

Mary, the God-bearer, SAW what God was doing.

In Abraham, Moses, David, and now in Mary,

God has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

God has brought down the powerful from their thrones

God has lifted up the lowly and filled the hungry with good things.

God has sent the rich away – empty.

And God has brought life to the barren womb of Elizabeth.

Now together the two women, their wombs expanding with life,

see God’s work and rejoice that God’s promise to David

is going to be fulfilled by the baby is Mary’s womb.

And what is most amazing, most breath-taking for US… is

not the cultural climate in which we live,

not the mood of our rings,

not the clothing we pull out for Mary, the God-bearer.

What’s most amazing is that

God chose to enter the human condition…

And “despite our meanness, despite our faithlessness

despite the danger and disgrace of doing so,

God chose to become our friend…forever…

and clasping our hand and never letting us go is Jesus.” (Sam Wells)

Small and unpretentious, the littlest present of all,

this One who comes to us as a baby

is the best present we can open this or any year.

And like Mary, if we keep our eyes open and look to Jesus,

through Him

we will see the work of the One who dismantles unjust systems of power,

overcomes inequality

fills the hungry

and brings new life to those who are barren.

Jesus is the light of the world. LOOK for him. SEE in Him God’s goodness

God’s grace, God’s love.

Become a God-bearer yourself

Sing God’s praise and offer the gift of hope and light to all who suffer.

May God’s peace be yours this Christmas.

 -The Rev. Julie Kelsey