

***What Song Is Rising Up in You?***

**Advent 4B, Luke 1:26-38**

**Grace Church Newton**

**December 24, 2023**

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*Hail, Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Hail, Mary, Mother of God. Pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.*

This is an odd interlude. It happens about every six or seven years, depending on when leap year falls. This morning, we worship with readings and prayers focused on Advent. In six hours or so, we will proclaim the birth of Jesus and celebrate Christmas. So, it's an interesting time to observe Advent. This small window.

I'm not so good at the waiting part – often not comfortable staying in the moment and not thinking ahead. I found myself early in the week transitioning from offering Advent blessings to wishing people a Merry Christmas. Now it's true – most other people in our culture don't observe Advent the way we do. Many have been celebrating the Christmas season since Thanksgiving, perhaps...Or – in our commercial world – since Halloween, even...

But this is our practice, to observe the season of Advent. And here we are, with this odd moment. This time of something *coming, arriving – something gestating* – but not yet here. And I am glad for this window. It offers a moment for a particular kind of reflection.

So, in this more-in-between-time-than-usual time – some might say this *liminal* time – this time in which something new is being born – I want to pose a question for us, a question we might ponder in these in-between hours. I'd like to do that by looking at two of today's texts: the Annunciation (the angel's visit to Mary from the Gospel reading) and the Magnificat (Mary's song of praise).

In our Gospel reading today, the angel Gabriel comes to Mary. "Greetings, favored one," the angel says. Or, in the words of the treasured prayer, "Hail, Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with thee." The angel continues, describing God's plan for Mary – this very young, most likely uneducated woman, betrothed but not yet married – the angel shared God's plan for

Mary to conceive and bear a son whose name will be Jesus – Yeshua in Hebrew, meaning “God’s salvation.”

Mary’s response is shockingly bold – here is a *teenager* – 15, 16 years old – willing to say, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord. Let it be with me as God wills.” (Luke 1:38).

In the song we just sang as an introduction to the gospel reading – “The angel Gabriel from heaven came” – verse three describes Mary’s response to the angel’s message in this way: “Then gentle Mary meekly bowed her head.” Mary wasn’t gentle. Her response wasn’t meek. It was pretty revolutionary. A *teenager* agreeing to become pregnant and carry a child outside of her wedding contract, in a time when such a choice could bring the harshest of penalties, even death.

This is the story we heard in this morning’s gospel. Today’s portion concludes with Gabriel instructing Mary to go visit her cousin Elizabeth, who was “with child” at the same time. We don’t have this portion today, but we know the story. Mary shows up at Elizabeth’s door. Young, as-yet-unmarried, facing at the very least becoming an outcast and at the worst, great danger because of her pregnancy. Elizabeth could have responded in any number of ways – she could have shamed Mary, or shunned her; she could have been fearful on Mary’s behalf. Instead, she recognized the hand of God at work...and she blessed her. “Blessed art thou amongst women,” she said, “and blessed is the fruit of thy womb” (Luke 1:42).

And Mary’s? In response to the gift of Elizabeth’s blessing, Mary found her voice. In response to Elizabeth’s affirmation, she broke out in song, expressing in her own way the words of the Jewish tradition she carried within her.

Mary’s is not an easy song: “God has cast down the mighty from their thrones” and “lifted up the lowly.” God “has scattered the proud in their conceit.” God has “filled the hungry with good things” and “sent the rich away empty” (Luke 1:46-55). It’s not an easy song.

But Mary knows that God, the source of this life within her, is a God of restoration. A God who desires healing and wholeness. A God who sends a child who is to be named Jesus, God’s Salvation.

This, this is what God wishes to bring into our world. This is the life that is growing within Mary – this is the physical manifestation of God’s desire for wholeness and well-being for each of us, for this community, for the world around us.

I started my remarks this morning by saying I have a question for us to consider in this in-between time. As we, along with Mary and Elizabeth await our annual remembrance of the coming of this baby – this new life in God – perhaps you might ask yourself: what is being born within me? What bold and brave thing is God inviting me into? What song is rising up within me?

Now, of course it's not going to come into being in the next six hours, but in this in-between time, I invite us to listen for the voices of our own angels. What is God asking you to say "yes" to?