

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Luke 1:39-55

Just before the birth of Jesus there was a sense of expectation and hope. People were waiting and wondering. They felt like something wonderful was about to happen. The Scriptures had promised the coming of the Messiah who was going to turn the world around and deliver Israel from all her enemies. He would usher in the kingdom of God.

However, in the child born in a lowly stable, the reality was greater than the expectation. No one could have guessed how this child would change the world. No one could have imagined the impact He would have on world history, and the change He would make in people's lives.

Not even Mary fully understood the difference the child she was carrying would make. She knew He would be something special, for an angel had visited her and told her what was going to happen. In spite of her fear, and being overwhelmed by the presence of this powerful spiritual being, she said, "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said" She had been thinking about all of this for quite awhile, and when she went to visit her relative, Elizabeth, her joy spilled into song.

We are all familiar with the Song of Mary and some of us might even be able to say it from memory. The Song of Mary, also known as the Magnificat, contains important truths for us to understand. Mary made three key statements.

The first thing that Mary sang was: My soul magnifies the Lord

and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. She begins by praising God for His salvation. The keyword here is forgiveness. Her first response to the good news of God bringing forgiveness to the world was to worship. Mary was probably about thirteen years of age, for betrothals commonly took place when a girl was thirteen, and the marriage took place about a year later. She has amazing maturity and spiritual depth for her age.

This helps us to understand what kind of person Mary was. She truly was a special person. She loved the Lord for He had done great things for her. She understood that she did not deserve this special privilege of being the mother of the Messiah. She was a special person, and had been faithful in her obedience and love for God, but still she needed a Savior just like the rest of us.

God not only became her Savior, but bestowed on her the privilege of being the one who would bring God's Son into the world. He would bring forgiveness to the human family. This was more than enough reason for her to worship.

The second thing Mary sang was: The Mighty One has done great things. The mighty things that God was doing would overcome the world and turn the world right-side-up. She sang about God scattering the proud. She said that He brought down rulers from their thrones and lifted up the humble. He filled the hungry, but sent the rich away with empty stomachs. In other words, God turned the tables on the world. Those who were proud and arrogant, having power in this world to oppress others, would be scattered by God. Those who ruled with injustice would be pulled down from their thrones, and the humble servants would be put in their place. Those who used their wealth to oppress the poor would live in spiritual hunger, while those who were the poor of this world would be filled with all the good things of God. All of this would take place because

of what Jesus would do. He would reverse the fortunes of the proud and humble, the rich and poor, the strong and weak. He was the Savior who would right the wrongs of the world and would give those who were downtrodden great reason to rejoice. What this means is that Jesus came for everyone, regardless of their status in the world. The humble are valued by God, and even the arrogant can humble themselves and become right with God. The oppressed find mercy and help. The oppressors can stop their oppression, and find grace. Those who are weak can be strong in God. The strong can admit their weakness apart from God, and find true strength. But we have to come to God on His terms rather than ours. We humble ourselves. We admit our weakness. We turn from our sin and turn to God for His strength, His wealth, and His wholeness.

In the world today people are crashing and can't seem to figure out why. They believe that as long as we believe in God and practice some form of religion, don't we all get to heaven eventually? Can't we love God and still live any way we want?

The answer is no. We cannot live outside of God's will and expect God's blessing. Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me".

He enables us to overcome this world if we are willing to let Him have control of our life. He is victorious over life, for He has said, "Take heart! I have overcome the world".

Christ brings forgiveness and victory, but Mary also sang of something else. The third thing she said in her song was: He has helped His servant Israel. What she was referring to was God's covenant with Israel. Covenant is important because it means that God keeps His promises. He does not forget. He does not get sidetracked.

Being in covenant with God means that we are a part of

something bigger than ourselves. God has made promises to us and committed Himself to us with cords of love. God has committed Himself to us. He is on our side. He is for us, not against us. Anyone who threatens us must ultimately deal with Him. His love has committed Him to us in ways which we cannot now fully comprehend.

Because of what God has done, we worship Him for His forgiveness, His victory over the world, and His covenant with us. Our response should be patterned after Mary's: "Lord, here is my life. I will do whatever You want me to do. I will go wherever You want me to go. Make me Your servant."

AMEN.