

## Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

## *My Soul Magnifies*

## Gospel Lesson

Luke 1: 26-38; 1:46b-55 (NRSV)

<sup>26</sup>In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, <sup>27</sup>to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup>And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." <sup>29</sup>But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup>The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup>And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. <sup>32</sup>He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. <sup>33</sup>He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." <sup>34</sup>Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" <sup>35</sup>The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. <sup>36</sup>And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. <sup>37</sup>For nothing will be impossible with God." <sup>38</sup>Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

"My soul magnifies the Lord,  
<sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
<sup>48</sup> for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.  
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;  
<sup>49</sup> for the Mighty One has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.  
<sup>50</sup> His mercy is for those who fear him  
from generation to generation.  
<sup>51</sup> He has shown strength with his arm;  
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.  
<sup>52</sup> He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,  
and lifted up the lowly;  
<sup>53</sup> he has filled the hungry with good things,  
and sent the rich away empty.  
<sup>54</sup> He has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,  
<sup>55</sup> according to the promise he made to our ancestors,  
to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

## Bible/Sermon Focus

This week, Pastor Andy compared the last nine months of our Season of Weirdness to the gestation time of Jesus from conception to birth. The timespan is remarkably close. Though it should be noted that Jesus of Nazareth is not thought to actually have been born on December 25<sup>th</sup>; that date was set later by the church. Nevertheless, it is an interesting coincidence indeed.

Our scripture for this week was two stories about Mary, the mother of Jesus: the "Annunciation" and the "Magnificat." Mary is such an odd figure. Almost every time angels appear; the scripture tells us that the people to whom they appear are afraid. But not Mary. Mary asks questions of Gabriel. He does not answer. Mary feels the presence of God and the Spirit, and that seems enough, at least according to Luke.

There have always been, and even more so in recent history, questions around the virginity of Mary. Luke pulls from the prophet Isaiah in claiming Mary's virginity. Isaiah 7:14 reads: "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel." You'll notice that this same translation (the NRSV) does not use the word virgin, but uses the term "young girl." These translation issues have led some scholars to wonder about Luke's translation of the Isaiah text, and to throw into question the virgin birth. Within our diversity of biblical witness, I point this out only to say that it makes Mary's situation no more or less precarious or threatening to her. The risk for her as an unwed woman with a child is dangerous enough for her to be killed. However, it seems unfair to Christian history not to point out the overabundance of people who have questioned the virgin birth.

Mary's Magnificat is one of the most treasured texts in our Bible. Similar to the songs of Miriam and Hannah in the Old Testament, Mary sings across time, and yet sings to the exact point of her moment in history. Mary's awareness of the situation at hand is a testimony and a witness to those who are willing to be co-conspirators with God. The same is true of Elizabeth. The same is also true of Joseph, though we didn't get that far in our reading of Luke. This group of people, inspired by the Holy Spirit and the will of God, cared and covered for each other in their deeply unconventional situations. They kept each other safe, when they could have turned each other over to the authorities of their day. They showed us how God makes family.

In this season of liminality and gestation, when all seems desolate, let us remember the angel's words about Elizabeth, a woman thought to be barren, "For nothing will be impossible with God."

## Discussion Questions

1. Does your perception of this Season of Weirdness change if you consider it a time of gestation? How so?
2. Were you taught that it is okay to question angels? God?
3. What do you do when the only answer to your many questions is, "The Holy Spirit will be with you."? Is that a satisfying answer?
4. Reflect on this quote from Rev. Dr. Robert E Goss: "The way families are presented in the Gospel of Luke 'gave men and women a new freedom by subverting hierarchy and allegiance to the patriarchal household.'"
5. How have you heard this story of Mary with new ears or in new ways, over the years you've heard it?
6. Reflect on the quote from Dr. Jane Shaberg, in reference to the Magnificat: "The spiritual world is understood as embedded in socioeconomic and political reality. Focus is on the might, holiness, and mercy of God, who has promised solidarity with those who suffer and who is true to those promises. God is 'magnified' for affecting changes - now, in history."

## Prayer

Holy God, we stand in awe of the magnificence of your wisdom. We rejoice in your creativity. You who scatter the proud in the thoughts of their hearts, You who bring down the powerful from their thrones, You who fill the hungry with good things, we praise You, O God! Be with us in our season of weirdness. Teach us patience as we wait without our questions answered. Teach us presence with each other as you gifted Elizabeth and Mary. Awaken us to new ways of being and doing family, as you did with the Holy Family. It's the name of your Son, and by the power of Your Spirit, we pray. Amen.

*The liminality of Advent is a threshold in between what is and what is to come. Waiting, hoping, anticipating.*