

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

A Ruler for the Remnant

Old Testament Lesson

Micah 5:2-5a (NRSV)

- ² But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah,
 who are one of the little clans of Judah,
 from you shall come forth for me
 one who is to rule in Israel,
 whose origin is from of old,
 from ancient days.
- ³ Therefore he shall give them up until the time
 when she who is in labor has brought forth;
 then the rest of his kindred shall return
 to the people of Israel.
- ⁴ And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the LORD,
 in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.
 And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great
 to the ends of the earth;
- ⁵ and he shall be the one of peace.

Gospel Lesson

Luke 1:39-55 (NRSV)

³⁹ In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, ⁴⁰ where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ⁴² and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. ⁴³ And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴ For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.

⁴⁶ And Mary said,

- "My soul magnifies the Lord,
⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
⁴⁸ for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.
 Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
 and holy is his name.
⁵⁰ His mercy is for those who fear him
 from generation to generation.
⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm;
 he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
⁵² He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
 and lifted up the lowly;

- ⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
⁵⁵ according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

Bible/Sermon Focus

Dr. Elizabeth Johnson calls the Magnificat of Mary the first ever advent hymn, made up of two verses. The first verse focuses on Mary's personal relationship with God and the second verse on sharing God's vision for community. This hymn comes to us from an unlikely source, in an unlikely space. The Bible isn't known for being filled with scenes of two pregnant women talking of revolutionary things.

Very little of the Biblical text has been considered to be written by women. Because of this, the examples of women and female relationships that we have are very limited and are mostly written from the perspective of men. When writing on how to approach depictions of women and female relationships in the Old Testament, scholar Deryn Guest notes three themes to keep in mind when doing a critical reading. The first is the valorization of motherhood. The second is women as competitive rivals (living in relationship based off of competition instead of cooperation). The third is a theme of complementarianism (that women need men to be complete, or the other way around).

These three themes are extremely predominant many Old Testament in stories about women. Which is why the scene depicted in Luke 1 between Mary and Elizabeth is so different.

What child is this? (*What children are these?*)

Because she is married, pregnant Elizabeth may fit our common view of pregnant women in scripture, but pregnant Mary does not. The valorization of motherhood is held solely for married women in their culture (and arguably our own as well). Neither woman approaches the other in competition for the most revered place of power. And neither woman is expressing a fulfillment of calling based on their relationship to their husband. This story is written differently. Even the most rigorous, feminist critiques of the Magnificat stand in stark contrast to the rest of the Bible, and to other texts from the same time period in the Near East.

Non-Catholics are not known for having a high Mariology (a theology of Mary), but there seems to be a trend moving in non-Catholic denominations. As people of all genders continue to use the Bible and the Gospels as their source of hope in a broken world, the depiction of the mother of the messiah is one that has been re-energized in recent generations. It is the role of women in the advent stories that has gotten the most social media attention among Millennials and Gen Z. And not surprisingly, these depictions of Mary go hand-in-hand with depictions of Joseph as the ultimate partner to the mother of the messiah, who reframes masculinity.

For decades statistics have been telling us that younger generations have found the Bible (and the church) to be antiquated and irrelevant. But the recent embrace of the Holy Family as a

relational model that frees Mary and Joseph from supposed gender roles, and encourages them toward their God-given callings, should give us hope. The Gospel remains good news "from generation to generation."

The Magnificat is a song of love and hope and revolutionary things, heard by two babies through the muffled sound of their mother's womb. Witnessed by the mother of the messiah's witness. Supported by men who teach us that strength can be expressed in silence.

What a different story. What a magnificent story.

Discussion Questions

1. Share some depictions/posts/tweets/memes about Mary, Joseph, Elizabeth, or Zechariah.
2. Pastor Andy pointed out that both Mary and Elizabeth knew that Mary was carrying the Messiah. How do you think Elizabeth knew?
3. What character from our Advent stories is bringing you the most hope this season?
4. Is there a version of "The Magnificat" that you hold closest to your heart?
5. Reflect on this quote from Cole Arthur Riley: "Silence is a fierce resistance against the violence of a world whose words are not for us."
6. Where do you see the "valorization of motherhood" in our world today? (All motherhood? Or just some specific expressions of motherhood?)

Prayer

O come, Emmanuel. Open wide our heavenly home. O come, Desire of nations, bind together all peoples in one heart and mind. Bid all our sad divisions cease, and be yourself our King of Peace. Amen.

God loves each of us, God has done "great things" for us in unique and personal ways AND The Spirit calls all of us into gracious and loving relationship with one another, to create a community of justice and love.