

Sermon 4th Sunday of Advent 2021 – Be like Mary

When my children were little, I used to love reading to them! they had favourite stories that I would readd again and again – and they used to say the words with me – even though they couldn't read! Today we hear very a familiar story – the meeting between Mary and Elizabeth and the joyful sound of Mary's song: "My soul magnifies the Lord". It is such a beautiful story interwoven with many other stories to compile the great story of God's people Israel.

There's the story of Elizabeth, about to bear a child despite her age and earlier inability to conceive.

There is the story of Mary whose pregnancy is also unexpected and unplanned. The story of John, born to be the messenger spoken of by Isaiah who would prepare the way of the Lord, and the story of Jesus, born to **be** the Lord whose coming has been foretold by the prophets; There are the stories of Zechariah and Joseph, men and fathers who fade into the background as John and Jesus follow their own destiny.

Today, though, the Gospel centres on these two mothers, women who have such different experiences of bearing sons but who both know that those sons are destined to fulfil God's purposes for his people.

Today is about the faith and the joy of these two women whose children, it seems, know each other already. Two women whose faith led them to say "Yes"

to God. All generations will call them blessed. And we are one of those generations, so what does their story mean for us today?

Mary and Elizabeth hold within their bodies, and within their hearts and minds, God's promise of new life, of justice and mercy and if ever there was a time in this world when we needed that new life, justice and mercy then surely this is it - now.

And, perhaps in every generation God looks for the people who will say yes to his plans, who will carry in themselves the light of Christ, seeking to shine it into the dark places of this world. We can listen to the familiar stories this Christmas without getting too involved in them, or we can say yes to God and become part of those stories, part of the bigger story of God's people from generation to generation.

God may not ask us to go into the desert or bear a child for him. But he might ask us to do something which could be difficult for us, but wonderful for those around us.

He might ask us to be more loving in our lives, to think before we condemn people who are different from us, and then to be more patient and tolerant of them. He may ask us to think before we shut someone out of our lives, and to seek reconciliation when we fall out with friends or relatives. He might ask us to think before we assume the worst of people and give them another chance. He could ask us to think before we criticise

and judge and find people's true story. He does ask us to pray for the needs of others, but then we should be prepared to be part of God's answer.

Mary tells us is that God looks with favour on the lowliness of his servant; that his mercy is for those who fear him, that he fulfils the promises he makes.

Whatever God asks of you, you are good enough, and He will be with you to channel His love to others.

Mary was faithful. She could have responded many different ways to the angel's message, but when God called on Mary for this assignment, she willingly and enthusiastically said yes. Risking embarrassment, misunderstanding and ridicule; even chancing the rejection of Joseph, she said yes to God. She became an available vessel. She was willing to change her plans to fit God's plans. The only way Mary could fulfil God's plan was to have an unshakable, untiring and unyielding faith. Her faith would give her the courage and strength to do God's will.

Just as God had a plan for Mary's life, He has a plan for you also. He wants to form the character of Jesus Christ in you. He wants to use you to share the Good News of Jesus with others that may know you, but don't know Him.

Just as Mary had to exercise faith to complete her God-given mission, so must we. We must believe in God's promises, no matter what our circumstances say. We must be confident that God is able to do in us and

through us what seems impossible to us. Let Mary's faith inspire you to believe that God can and will do the impossible in and through you.

Mary was not only faithful, but joyful. Her example of willingly and joyously accepting God's call should inspire us to do the same. Just as Mary physically carried the Christ-child, risking all the potential persecution this could involve, so we should willingly and joyously carry and present Jesus to the people we interact with every day. We must be ready to risk misunderstanding, ridicule, and rejection for Christ's sake.

Christmas is about receiving more than a temporary fix of happiness; it is about a relationship with the King of Joy-Jesus Christ. It is about having and living in a supernatural joy that supersedes our circumstances and strengthens us; spirit, soul and body so that we can increase our faith, pray for others, care for others, give the benefit of the doubt to others, in short, to be Christ-like. Making our own story!

Let this Christmas be a time when we learn a lesson from Mary's life. May we always be available and appreciative servants of the Lord so that when we say yes, and perhaps because we say yes, to whatever it is God is asking of us we will also be able to say, with Mary, 'My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour'. Amen