

When It Seems Most Impossible, Sing!

(Luke 1:39-55)

Sermon delivered by The Very Rev. Matt Rhodes at Christ Church, Millwood, Virginia
The Fourth Sunday of Advent, December 23, 2018

In the name of the one God, creator, redeemer, and sustainer. Amen.

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

The verses in today's reading from the Gospel of Luke are some of the most wonderful in the entire Bible. In fact, I would argue they are among some of the most beautiful language ever written.

Here we have two women – one a young teenage girl, the other a woman who had long passed the typical age of childbirth – carrying within them signs of the miraculous and blessed power of God. The first bears the one whose name will be Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. She is *theotokos*, the God-bearer ... the Mother of God. The other bears the prophet who will one day walk into the wilderness only to call to the world from this barren place, crying out for all to prepare the way for the Messiah.

Both of these women had to have been incredibly frightened. Elizabeth, the wife of Zechariah, was older and had been childless her entire life. She was at the point, she undoubtedly thought, when childbirth was impossible, her age surely preventing her from ever experiencing such a moment. And we have Mary, the young girl (presumed to be around the age of 13 or 14) engaged to a carpenter, Joseph, but to whom she was not yet married. Yet somehow she was pregnant, the recipient of a visitation from the archangel and a blessing from God. Such an occurrence would have been scandalous in the culture of her time.

These two mothers had every reason to be terrified, yet in this passage we see nothing but ***joy***, and ***praise***, and ***thanksgiving***. Instead of being frightened by what life held in store for them, they ***rejoiced***. They offered praise to God. And in the case of Mary, there was ***singing***. Yes, I believe these verses were not something she simply said; I firmly believe that the praises she lifted are very appropriately entitled "The Song of Mary."

What to me is one of the most remarkable things about the words of the Magnificat is that they were impromptu. Mary, swept up in the moment of celebration with her cousin, opened herself up to the Holy Spirit ... and this is what came forth. There was no advance preparation; she did not sit down and write them on a slip of paper, holding on to them until the time was right to deliver them. They are the sort of powerful words that erupt from within when someone recognizes they are not their source, but purely their conduit.

And these are not the words of a scared teenage girl uncertain of what she or her child would do in the coming years. These are instead very much the words of one strengthened by God and sure in the knowledge that the blessed son she carried would **change the world**.

The child she carried would cross boundaries, disrupt norms and tear down walls, reaching his hand out to those ignored by society and cast to the margins. The child she carried would time and again throughout his ministry remind the poor in spirit ... the hungry ... those in mourning ... the meek ... the peacemakers ... the merciful ... the pure in heart ... the persecuted: he would remind them **all** that **they** were blessed. He would reassure all despised by society ... all who lived their lives just out of the view of many in their world ... that **they were blessed**.

In essence, her child would remind all he encountered in his mission and ministry among the people of the earth that regardless of the circumstances, they had reason ... to **sing**. But today, in this passage from Luke, none of this has happened. The ministry of the child of Mary was many years in the future. And yet on this day, in this time with her cousin, the young mother of God – this frightened and uncertain girl – would **sing**.

How often as we find ourselves dealing with fear or uncertainty do we take time to **celebrate**? When in our lives do we find ourselves in the midst of incredibly difficult circumstances and choose to stop and **sing**? Without question it seems counterintuitive. But in this passage, in this moment when Mary has left her home to travel to the home of her cousin to share news ... and indeed, to share fear and uncertainty ... we find a model of what we can do.

As this season of Advent draws to a close and we approach the miracle of the Nativity, Mary is demonstrating for us how to counter our fears. In the midst of the uncertainties in our lives, in those moments when difficult circumstances seem to constantly shift the ground beneath our feet, we are reminded not to fear but to give thanks. We are reminded that we are blessed. Like this young mother thousands of years ago, we are asked to stop trying to bear our burdens alone and instead to allow our souls to reach out to God.

We are asked to magnify the Lord in our own lives. In difficult times we are asked to rejoice in God our Savior.

And at all times and in all places we are encouraged no matter how hard we are pulled in the opposite direction ... to **sing**.

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

Amen.