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St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church
4th Sunday of Advent/Year C
December 23, 2018
Text: Luke 1: 39-45, 46-55

It is the Fourth Sunday of Advent and Christmas is practically upon us!

Throughout these weeks of Advent we have been reminded of many things; that even in the midst of darkness and signs all around us-we are to live as people of *hope*, as people standing ready because God is always birthing something new in the world. We have been reminded by the voice that cried out in the wilderness to turn our minds and hearts around in order to make a straight path for the Messiah who came, who is present, and is to come again. And then last Sunday as we lit the pink candle of *joy* we were reminded that in order to prepare for the Messiah's coming we must also bear good fruit. How? By living out God's commandment to love our neighbor.

Thanks to the writer Luke, we have the birth narratives of Jesus and of John. These are not found in any of the other gospels and without them the Christmas story would not be complete. Countless theologians, writers, and artists throughout the centuries have poured over the story especially of Jesus' birth, giving the world a glimpse, perhaps a vision, of the first Advent, the first coming of Christ in the world.

It all begins with the story of a poor and unmarried teenager whose name we know was Mary. Mary was told that God had chosen her before all others to be the *theokotos*, the God bearer. Her son would be great, the angel Gabriel said to her. In spite of her circumstance and the knowledge of what could happen to unmarried and pregnant women in her day, Mary boldly said 'yes' to God's messenger. "*Let it be done to me according to your word.*"

Without so much as a word to her fiancé, Joseph the carpenter, Mary set off to a town in the hills of Judea, to the house of Zachariah and her older relative, Elizabeth.

The gospel for today takes us there and we hear and witness the encounter between two blessed and highly favored women. Mary and Elizabeth embrace one another and instantly rejoice in the gifts they have both been given; gifts not only

for them but for the entire world. And we are told that the prophet John, safely cushioned within the warmth of his mother's womb; she who was once disgraced because she had never borne a child, leapt for joy.

Mary returned Elizabeth's greeting and began to praise God for fulfilling what was promised through the prophets in ages past. Mary, full of grace, pregnant with the Word, the Word who was with God and was God, sings a song of praise, her Magnificat, for what God can and will do through the child she carries. Because of him, she is blessed. Because of him, the world will be turned upside down. The humble and lowly will be lifted up. The powerful will be knocked down from their thrones. The hungry will be filled with good things. The rich will be sent away empty. He will show mercy to those who fear him and stay true to the promises he has made. His kingdom shall never end. Mary's song was for anyone who thought God had forgotten God's promise to be with them and love them.

Mary sang aloud a song of faith and thanksgiving, a song that reverberates in our time not only during the season of Advent but all year long. Mary's song is our song for God's promises, God's dreams, still come to pass and will come to pass even when all seems to look and feel otherwise.

Can you imagine God calling us to give birth to God's gifts of hope, peace, joy, and love? To God's gifts of tolerance, forbearance, compassion, forgiveness? God certainly has need of these gifts and more. Gifts that are found inside each and every one of us. I hope that like Mary, we can speak our *fiat*, our 'yes', to God's will and to our availability to be used for God's glory without fear or shame. The world certainly has use of the gifts we bring no matter how large or small.

May we, like Mary, live lives of true faith and as bearers of God, the Light which is Christ. May we live and love as Jesus taught. So that by humble example, we can show others the way of Jesus. May we help give birth to those things that our families, our neighbors, the nation, and the world so sorely need today.

Like Mary and Elizabeth, let us not forget to give thanks to our almighty God for all God has done for us. For in spite of our busyness and pre-occupations that seem to strong arm our attentions, God's hand is forever at work in creation and throughout our lives.

As we approach the manger in Bethlehem to adore him who came among us, let us join our voices with Mary.

May your souls magnify the Lord, and your spirits rejoice in God your Savior. For he has looked with favor on you, and all generations will indeed, call you bless. For the Mighty One has done great things for you, and holy, holy is God's name. Amen!