

Mary's Magnificat begins this section by affirming: "I am the Lord's Servant, May it be to me as you have said. My soul magnifies the Lord!" Affirmations that however God can use her, that is the purpose she wants in life. Is that where we are? More often than not I hear folk wanting to receive all they can get, to create the life they want on their own terms; and in terms of faith wanting to stand toe to toe with God telling God we do not like the way he has things run...

Last weekend six tornadoes caused devastation across Arkansas, Illinois, Kentucky, Mississippi, Missouri and Tennessee. Early this week there were storms and flooding across Colorado, and a Tornado in Minnesota! Estimates are that roughly 75 people were killed in so many small towns in Kentucky alone. As horrific as this is, perhaps the greater tragedy is that our News cycles have become so crisis driven, that each of these is just one more circumstance for which we are to react and move on. My older brothers live in Peducah and Paris, Kentucky (which are on either side of Mayfield). Both of whom emerged unscathed, although the one describes having heeded the warnings by sleeping in his bathtub, wearing a hardhat, with his bed's mattress covering him.

We start here this morning for three reasons.

Tornadoes are impossible to predict because they come out of no where, touch down and are gone; similar to this story, and different from every other story, not only in the Bible but Human History, this passage from Luke comes without any precipitating event. Exodus happened because God witnessed the suffering of People. Isaiah's prophecy came in response to attacks on Israel. The people brought Jesus before Pontius Pilate, because they did not have authority to execute him, and they wanted him dead. Elizabeth and Mary each being with child, had pregnancies that were not routine, but are PREGNANCIES equal to the parting of the Red Sea, or exile of Israel for 70 years! Neither of their pregnancies come in response to some specific historic event. The only thing we know initiating Elizabeth's pregnancy is that she prayed to God and was found to be with child; Mary not only did not request this, she is not married and she is biologically too young to conceive! **MARY'S PREGNANCY IS ALL OF GOD'S DOING!**

Second, as absurd as sleeping in a bathtub wearing a hardhat, covered by a mattress; the announcement of the coming of the Messiah (who will redeem Israel, be sacrificed and conquer Death for all the world) is not announced by Angels and Archangels, not by Emperors or Ordained Elders, but by two poor women who meet in a kitchen in the Judean countryside to commiserate about their pregnancies! Perhaps Mary is a symbol for Christianity far too young to change the world, because in a culture where girls were often betrothed at 13 or 14, Mary is described as younger than that; AND Elizabeth is JUDAISM who was our age and had never had a child. These two should be pregnant with John the Baptist and Jesus!

One of the babies kicks; Blessings are shared; Astonishment expressed; Songs are sung by two women. When preachers get too serious about this text, Mary's Magnificat can sound angry and prophetic; when being spoken or sung from the mouth of this young girl, the words describe an upside-down reality our Reality, being turned over by the Human INCARNATION of God, brought about by the birth of her child. **THE STORY IS ABSURD!**

Third, just as we each look for personal connections, relationship of whom we may know were effected, God gave Elizabeth and Mary what they both most needed, a sense of connection and community, that just like us they were not alone!

One had lived her life in tiny town of Nazareth, the other outside the Capital: Jerusalem.

Mary, too young to understand what was happening to her, what would be expected of her, subject not

only to gossip but the possibility of being stoned to death for what others assumed she had done. Elizabeth, like Sarah and Hannah before her, the subject of jokes and idle talk questioning why this happened now and not when she was younger and more fertile, speculating how old she would be when the child came of age, and what to do about stretch marks at age 80.

Connecting together, their own circumstance provides context and meaning for the other's. Creating community together, neither is alone or isolated anymore, they have found each other. **This is possibly the heart of what we want to think about as an Advent message distinct from the upcoming Christmas one:** A sense of Community takes time to develop, love matures. Much like all of us in response to the Coming of Jesus, Elizabeth verbalizes: "Why has this happened to me?"

This very human-sized story grants us access to the world-changing incarnation that is about to come.

ADVENT IS ABOUT LOVE: CONNECTION/ COMMUNITY

The church has never known quite what to say or do with Mary.

Catholic theology especially during the Middle Ages approached declaring four parts to God, instead of the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Was she somehow DIVINE as being the MOTHER OF GOD?

The Gospel of John, the most miraculous and mystic of the Gospels does not mention Mary.

The Gospel of Mark identifies Mary with Jesus' brothers taking him home when they think he is insane.

Matthew has the whole lineage of Abraham and King David coming down through Joseph, and the angel appears to him, explaining about the birth of the Messiah, not to Mary.

Only according to Luke do the lineage and angel come through Mary, only Luke describing her virginity.

However, the response of Mary to the Angel in Luke 1: 38 becomes the same wording, as that of Jesus in Gethsemane Garden at Luke 22:42: "Let it be according to your word=Not my will but thy will be done."

Mary in most of the Gospels is present at the Cross and Tomb.

So rather than whether she was a virgin, rather than declaring her to be part of the Godhead, what I want to suggest is **Mary is the ARCHETYPE for us of HAVING FAITH, of Discipleship, of LOVE, of what it means to be an instrument of God, magnifying and glorifying God.**

While we in the Catholic and Protestant Churches ordinarily read this story only the Sunday before Christmas. Those in the Eastern Orthodox Churches have a far greater emphasis on Mary's encounter with the Angel.

What regularly surprised me about our Church's celebration of Mary was not the Virgin Birth question, but that Mary seemed to be pregnant only 6 days! The Orthodox Church identifies a specific day 40 weeks before Christmas, called the Feast of Annunciation, **celebrating GOD's Decision to enter into Human History nine months prior,** so typically in the Spring.

Rarely, when the Stars align, literally only once every few hundred years, the Eastern Orthodox Feast of the Annunciation falls on Our Roman Celebration of Easter, called **"Kyriopascha."**

The last time it happened was 1991, which was literally the year the Soviet Union fell and billions of Russian Orthodox Christians were suddenly able to worship God in freedom.

LOVE: ABSURD/ A SENSE OF COMMUNITY/ COMPLETELY OF GOD'S DOING!