

AWE THROUGH THE MAGNIFICAT

Holy is His Name, and his mercy reaches from age to age of those who fear Him.

Luke 1:46-56

There is something truly special about seeing Christmas through the eyes of a child. You have probably all seen it. There is expectation. There is longing. There is joy. There is overflowing awe. And it keeps you awake at night with wonder. When Jesus said, "You must become like a little child to enter the Kingdom of Heaven" he was thinking of such childhood virtues. These are virtues which because of sin we soon lose. But by God's grace we may be forgiven and soon regain them. In the Advent season, Mary teaches us to possess all these virtues. It is the Holy Spirit working through the Word who creates faith whereby we may possess them. Holy is His Name.

The reason for her awe filled hymn of praise comes readily as we consider the scene. It is a scene given to us by His Word that can be just as real for us. Two pregnant women meet in a small hill town which by the standards of even her day, were remote and totally insignificant. Both had been in impossible situations.

First, there was Elizabeth, an older woman, once removed from public notice because she was barren and old, her time of fertility past. We live in an age of increasing infertility, where couples wait too long to have children, following the lie of this age that, yet one more thing must be put in place before you can take time off from career and pursuit of material and emotional experiences to settle down or simply settle for children. The cry of Elizabeth is understood by many in our society. It is the cry of lament "Too late". Truly hers is an impossible situation.

Then, there is the younger woman, Mary. Fertility wasn't her issue. But the manner of the promise God made, through His holy angel that she would conceive and bear a son while a Virgin was. "How can this be?" Mary asked, "Since I have no relations with a man?" Truly, hers was also an impossible situation.

Nevertheless, as the angel spoke to Mary with words, as he had to Elizabeth and Zechariah with signs, the message was the same: "Nothing will be impossible for God". The two women stood facing one another in their impossible conditions. The older Elizabeth, was carrying the yet to be born John the Baptist and the younger Mary, carrying the Christ Child. When Elizabeth heard Mary's initial greeting, the yet unborn John leaped in the womb. For the Lord had come. Two infants were growing in the wombs from two impossible situations, preparing to be born.

Could there be any greater theme in the face of the miraculous overcoming the humanly impossible than "Holy is His Name"? It is doubtful. So that is exactly what Mary said "My soul magnifies the Lord" "Holy is His Name". In Elizabethan English as well as in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, the word magnify" was used to mean "esteem greatly" or to celebrate the greatness of". Her prayer didn't make God great, but by God's Spirit, and the miraculous work in her, the greatness of God was made manifest to her".

And through Luke recording this in His Gospel this greatness is bestowed unto us. Mary anticipates this saying "From henceforth all generations shall call me blessed".

Contemplate it for a moment, a season, a lifetime or even an eternity. The whole situation invokes awe. The miraculous overcomes the humanly impossible. Do you have an impossible situation? Christmas Hope. The miraculous can overcome it. Possess the virtue of awe.

A woman is Mother of God. One might say "How is this possible? God is eternal, he is the Creator. We are creatures, we are in time; how could a woman be "Mother of God", of the Eternal, given that we are all in time, we are all creatures".

Mary is blessed in knowing the holiness of God. In knowing of His Divine action Mary is further blessed in knowing His mercy. She knows the mercy contained first in the Promise. There is the Promise of the Messiah as we learned last week, even in Eden. One is born from an eternal family into a human family to take us all to our heavenly family. The Promise is carried through the Prophets. Mary sings of this in Mary's Song of Praise: The Magnificat. Luke 1: 55 "as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever". The Promise is specific in Isaiah 7:14 "And a Virgin will conceive..."

God becomes one of us so that he may die as one of us to atone for the sins of the whole world. It is a promise which extends from "age to age".

How much of this did Mary know? The full extent of God's mercy and her sacrifice in accomplishing God's mercy were yet to be fully revealed in another song, "Simeon's Song" known as the Nunc Dimittis Luke 2:22-35. Simeon could not hold back the truth and so said to Mary "And a sword shall pierce your own soul too".

Mary was a woman. Likely she was around fifteen years old. She was devout but though raised in the synagogue wouldn't have had the education even on par with her brothers. So some scholars, confronted by the cultural limitations imposed on Mary say "it was impossible for such a woman to sing such a song composed from her heart". It is too rich in poetry for her. It is too rich in symmetry and Scriptural allusions. It is too theologically developed. But such is our faith that Mary sang this song. And if she sang such a song so well written, with so much depth, with so much poetic symmetry then surely she had the knowledge. With this also, "nothing is impossible with God". In the great faith chapter of Hebrews 11, Mary could have easily been included. And for those Old Testament saints, part of the faith was in the vicarious atonement of the Christ.

Mercy would involve sacrifice. It was the sacrifice of her Son Jesus. She would stand at the foot of the cross and do what is hard for any parent to do. A child would die before his mother. Still the wonder, the awe and the mercy of God must have remained with her. In difficult situations many lose faith. Mary, we learn did not lose hers. She maintained faith and even encouraged it to grow within others.

Mary would gather at Pentecost with the 120. She would humbly listen and nod in ascent to the sermons of Peter. "Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago

through the mouth of David ... “ In this context of Acts 1, the Scripture was fulfilled in reference to Judas and his replacement, but we know that it was fulfilled in every other sense also. The mercy of God would continue from generation to generation. The mercy of God would continue through the Christ Child accomplishing his mission.

My friends, how many of us feel at rope’s end, facing impossible situations? Such is the human condition. There are those facing “terminal disease”. There are those with loved ones whose hard hearts cannot be swayed by any of our arguments for God and the Christ. There are those facing expenses exceeding income which by every means of creative accounting still say “debt”, “foreclosure” or “ruin”. Such is the human condition. Under this flesh, we live with the “impossible”.

But thanks be to God. By his grace and mercy “All things are possible”. An old woman conceives and bears a son. A virgin is with Child. Wealthy Magi bearing wondrous gifts visit the poor and call him King and bow before Him as God. Shepherds leave their flocks by night. Martyrs offer their lives to him. Gates of hell, try as they might, cannot prevail against His Church. A calendar with AD is made. Saints gather here to worship him while the world beyond the doors call and beacon with full enticements.

Nevertheless, a call cries forth “It is possible”. There is hope. Rejoice. Gaudette Sunday of Advent is nearly upon us. A pink candle shall be lit. Rejoice. Rejoice in the possible. May you’re childhood hope be recaptured.

Amen.