**12/22/24**

**Women Play the Lead**

**Vicar Vince Piekarski**

**Luke 1:39-45 [46-55] (NRSVUE)**

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 1:2, NRSVUE) (2) **Amen.**

Welcome back to our party folks! We have almost lit all of our candles on our Advent Wreath now! The outer ring of candles is completely lit, and we are waiting to light that big birthday candle in the middle known as the Christ Candle. In just a few more days we will get the chance to light it on Christmas Eve when we join with one another together to experience that very purity and light of Christ. That is precisely when our preparation and waiting throughout this birthday month will really turn into all that we have been hoping and praying for! We will celebrate the birth of our Savior!

With that being said I thank you once again for joining us here in-person or out there on our conference call. I assure you that we truly are better when we are together. We and the many other believers that unite together for services all over are the true representatives of what is the church. For church is not merely defined by a building or worship space, but by the people of God. This continued message of Advent, and this time of preparation, is one to experience and live out together with one another for sure. It is truly a blessing to be in your presence, and the presence of God, as we continue on in our journey towards Christmas.

Alright, now maybe you have heard me say this a time or two in the past, and just maybe you have not heard me say this at all. Regardless, the saying does indeed hold true, the Spirit wills and wants wherever it desires. In this particular instance this relates to my foreshadowing to the very story we heard about on the front end of our Gospel Reading here today. Believe it or not it was actually part of my sermon on December 8th if you happen to recall. Now, that of course was without my intent, or me even realizing that we would be reading it and talking about it today. However, I do think that it is pretty cool that the stories find a way to intermingle themselves together at times. Of course, there are always several important points for this whether we even realize them or not. The Spirit does indeed will and want wherever it desires, and hopefully the Spirit working opened your ears and hearts a few short weeks ago, and maybe even more so today in a manner that helped you grasp or really understand the stories.

Now, whether you realized it or not, we got two very distinct stories for the price of one here this morning. Not to mention that the main characters in these very stories are women. Yes, Mary and Elizabeth play the primary roles in our Gospel Reading. Unfortunately, that is just not something that happens all too often in our Biblical texts. Now, by no means does it mean that women did not play vital roles more often than we hear about. That perception could not be anything further from the truth. It also does not diminish the very power or importance of women in the life or the mission of the church. What it simply means and brings to light is that writing and accounts of life in Biblical times took on more of a male dominance due to the culture. Thankfully these stories stood out despite that, and women did not just merely play background or secondary roles as all too often was portrayed. So, it is indeed awesome that these two stories and women are highlighted today during this fourth week of Advent.

Yes, I managed to split this Gospel text into two stories for a specific reason, and we will attend to that as we go along here. As a matter of fact, there is actually a lot to take in with the first of these two stories believe it or not. Let us take into perspective the very fact that Mary would gather herself up, and travel quite a distance, that being over the course of a few days while recently conceiving as well. To make it even more interesting is the fact that she did so to be in service to her family member and friend, Elizabeth. Mary probably realized that a woman by all human concept and knowledge that was not even supposed to be pregnant at her age might need a little help and support. What is also very awesome was that Mary was said to have stayed on for some time and supported Elizabeth following her pregnancy as well. I must say that is an awesome story of love and respect for one another on display. I would also like to argue the more popular stance as I am also led to believe that Mary was not hiding from some government authority or the shame and disgrace of being pregnant and not married yet. I believe Mary was just genuinely excited for herself and Elizabeth, and for their children to come. It is already exciting being pregnant, but knowing that both your children are going to change the way and the culture of the world forever has to be completely awesome. So, as we take note of things, we come to the very realization that Mary was also exhibiting that Christlike love and respect that we hear about all too often. You know that very same Christlike love and respect we are indeed supposed to show for and to one another as well.

I also still find it absolutely remarkable that the little baby John leaped in his mother’s womb when he heard the voice of Mary. John knew that Jesus was present across the room from him in Mary’s stomach! In this instance we also find something was not visible, or even told to Elizabeth by Mary, but it was actually confirmed by the Spirit interceding in and through the words of Elizabeth as she proclaimed Mary’s pregnancy and the very significance of the child to be born. When I talked about this briefly a few weeks ago I truly meant it when I said how cool it was that even in the womb John seemed to realize the important work he had to do before his cousin would even be born. It was like John knew he was part of the larger picture, and this was almost his acceptance and confirmation to his role of paving the pathway we learned about the past few weeks. I am also led to believe that having a cousin meant a lot to John, but he knew how much more it would mean to the world well after his life and his ministry too.

I also continue to stand on this today as well, for I believe the author of the book of Luke included these very details because they were vitally important. They made the final cut in the Bible’s composition for it truly was meant for you and I to hear and appreciate. Let alone it was also meant for you and I to go out there and share with others as well.

That part of verse 42 that states “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.” (2) might be all too familiar to many of us as it is actually part of the prayer known as the Hail Mary. That very prayer is still said by many practicing Catholics, and others of varying faith traditions. Now, that is whether it is part of a host of rosary and other prayers that accompany it, or if it is just said in general. It is said to acknowledge Mary and her role in salvation history, and as an intercessory prayer in which we ask her to have her son intervene. Mary is indeed the mother of Jesus, and her role in the story, and her appreciation have been marked throughout history.

Alright, now that I have just uncovered my Catholic roots for some of you all just a little bit more than I expected, let us move on to that second story that I spoke of. We have indeed been blessed with Mary’s Song of Praise, or what we all may have heard referred to at one time or another as the Magnificat. That weird or awkward term is not so hard to breakdown or understand when we just pause a little bit and think about it. For it simply means to magnify, and we come to find that very meaning is not hidden at all for it is actually right in front of us in verse 46 in the very opening of the song. What we also learn and take heed to is the very fact that “The paradox of the Magnificat is the paradox of our faith. This is the “already” (past tense verbs) and “not yet” (hope for the future) of biblical eschatology. Already the reign of God has arrived, but when we look around at the world, we plead that God’s reign might yet come. Is not this the paradox of Advent itself: Christ already came (born, preached, healed, opposed the powers-that-be, died, resurrected, and ascended) and yet we begin the Christian year waiting, preparing, and hoping for him to come?” (6) “In the Magnificat, God foresees the mighty brought down and the rich sent away. God fills the hungry with good things! We are not powerless. With our God-given courage we must be forthright in confronting the mighty when they forget about — or even cause the suffering of — people. We are challenging established practices, calling out selfishness and immorality, and proclaiming the words of the Magnificat.” (10)

Through my various research, and things that fellow colleagues share with me, I have recently learned of Martin Luther’s very respect and admiration of Mary as well. Now it may not have been within the several documents that many of us are familiar with. However, rest assured that there is indeed documentation to support his thoughts and high regard for Mary as the mother of Jesus. To put it more simply let me share some of Martin Luther’s very own words, as he wrote, “One should honor Mary as she herself wished and as she expressed it in the Magnificat. She praised God for his deeds. How then can we praise her? The true honor of Mary is the honor of God, the praise of God’s grace…Mary is nothing for the sake of herself, but for the sake of Christ…Mary does not wish that we come to her, but through her to God. (Explanation of the Magnificat, 1521).” (11) That may or may not be where our very faith practices differ at times, for Martin Luther made it a point to ensure that we go through Mary to God, and not to her.

To add some additional content, or to clear things up a little more, let us listen to this additional piece from Luther. “Our prayer should include the Mother of God…What the Hail Mary says is that all glory should be given to God, using these words: “Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus Christ. Amen!” You see that these words are not concerned with prayer but purely with giving praise and honor…We can use the Hail Mary as a meditation in which we recite what grace God has given her. Second, we should add a wish that everyone may know and respect her… (Personal Prayer Book, 1522).” (11)

I hope you have learned a bit and are enjoying this season of Advent. I hope that this season of preparation and hope has drawn you closer to Christ. I hope you are looking forward to bringing yourself, and your family and friends here on Christmas Eve to experience more. I hope you look forward to singing Silent Night and holding a candle while welcoming the Light of the World. I hope you are readying yourselves and hoping for His return yet again on the clouds as well. Blessings to you and yours as we close out this season of Advent in the next few days.

**Amen.**

**References & Study Points**

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 Fourth Sunday of Advent

 The roots of our Christian witness, and the contagion of praise

 December 22, 2024

 Commentary on Luke 1:39-45 [46-55]

 Abraham Smith

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 Many scholars have repeatedly claimed that the gospel of Luke aims to introduce

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 Niveen Sarras

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 Fourth Sunday of Advent

 A paradoxical prophecy

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 O. Wesley Allen, Jr.

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 Having learned from the angel that she will give birth to the Son of God, Mary hurries

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 Judith Jones

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 Fourth Sunday of Advent (Year C)

 Traditionally, preachers move in one of two trajectories when reading this gospel for

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 By Fern Lee Hagedorn

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 Dave Armstrong

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**Luke 1:39-45 [46-55] (NRSVUE)**

 Elizabeth, John’s mother, and Mary, the mother of Jesus, are two women filled

 with the Holy Spirit and with faith. In Elizabeth’s inspired greeting and Mary’s

 song of praise we hear of a saving God who remembers, scatters, lifts up, and

 fulfills all things.

 39 In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill

 country, 40 where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.

 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And

 Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit 42 and exclaimed with a loud cry,

 “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. 43 And

 why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? 44 For

 as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for

 joy. 45 And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what

 was spoken to her by the Lord.”

 [46 And Mary said,

  “My soul magnifies the Lord,

   47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

  48 for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant.

   Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed,

  49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me,

   and holy is his name;

  50 indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him

   from generation to generation.

  51 He has shown strength with his arm;

   he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

  52 He has brought down the powerful from their thrones

   and lifted up the lowly;

  53 he has filled the hungry with good things

   and sent the rich away empty.

  54 He has come to the aid of his child Israel,

   in remembrance of his mercy,

  55 according to the promise he made to our ancestors,

   to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”]