

Luke 1: 46-55 “As if it Were Already True” Rev. Janet Chapman 12/14/25

Four-year-old Henry would not give up sucking his thumb, no matter how much his parents tried to stop him. His dad tried bribery, his mom tried castor oil on thumb, and finally they tried threats, warning him, “If you don’t stop sucking your thumb, your stomach is going to blow up like a balloon!” Later that day, walking in the park, mother and son saw a very pregnant woman sitting on a bench. Little Henry considered the pregnant woman gravely for a moment, then said to her, “Uh-oh, I know what you’ve been doing!” One of the problems with hearing the Christmas story over and over again is that we all know, or think we know, what the characters have been doing. There appears to be no way to recapture that initial shock that God is coming in the flesh to show us what real life looks like. Last week, we got John the Baptist’s warning about repentance pointing out that the news hasn’t all been good, as we get ready for the arrival of the Messiah. There’s been talk about axes and pitchforks, unquenchable fires and some folks getting taken while others are seemingly left behind, or so we think. Through all of it, we’ve been waiting for God. However, it seems that God has also been waiting for us, waiting for us to join in. In this season of Advent, John Dominic Crossan notes, we are waiting for God’s intervention, yet, at the same time, God is waiting for our collaboration, our willingness to step up to the plate. God’s realm is here, *but* only insofar as we accept it, enter it, live it, and thereby establish it. Apparently, Advent isn’t about passive waiting but something far more intentional.

So it is with great relief this morning that we hear from a different messenger, not John the Baptist but Mary the prophet, who will turn out to be Mary the mother of Jesus, but not yet. Today she is still a young maiden, chosen by God to bear a message before she ever bears a child. Cousin Elizabeth is the first one to hear what Mary has to say, and maybe that is because Elizabeth is the first one willing to listen. She too is pregnant, Luke says – about six months further along than Mary, and much, much older – so old, in fact, that her impending motherhood is as much a miracle as Mary’s. So she and Mary have a lot in common as do Zechariah, Elizabeth’s husband, & Mary. Zechariah is a priest who was also visited by the angel Gabriel prior to a much-

anticipated birth. Gabriel goes to tell Zechariah about the baby he and Elizabeth will have before he ever goes to talk to Mary. Unfortunately, Zechariah's annunciation did not go as well as Mary's did. When the angel told Zechariah that Elizabeth would bear a son, whose name would be John, Zechariah responded, "How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years." For this apparent impertinence, the angel zipped Zechariah's lips tightly shut, making him mute until the day he heard his son cry out for the first time. Six months later, when Gabriel told Mary that she would bear a son, she said more or less the same thing. "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" But for some reason, the angel went easier on her. He told her that the Holy Spirit would come upon her, that the power of the Most High would overshadow her, and instead of asking any more questions, she responded, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." So when she goes to visit Elizabeth and Zechariah, Mary can still speak, while all he can do is wave. Poor Zechariah – it was all women's voices for several days and all he could do was sit and listen. I can't help wondering what their conversation was like that day? Maybe comparing morning sickness stories or the anxieties about childbirth or just anticipating the joy of holding a newborn with all the possibilities on the horizon. Despite the differences in their age, there would have been a shared camaraderie between them. It reminds me of a story I heard around this time of year about a guy who was walking along the beach when he came across a lamp. He picked it up, rubbed it, and of course, a genie popped out. The genie told his new master he would grant three Christmas wishes. First, the guy said, "I want 100 million dollars." Poof! 100 million dollars appeared in his checking account. Second, he continued, "I'd like a new Mercedes convertible." Poof! A Mercedes convertible appeared right. Third, he smirked and winked, "I'd like to be irresistible to women." Poof! He turned into a box of chocolates.

Back to our scene from Luke - Elizabeth is so excited to see Mary that she exclaims loudly, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb." Even her own baby jumps for joy inside of her as new life is popping out all

over. Elizabeth is ecstatic that her young cousin has the good sense to believe that what is happening to her is not an illusion or a freak of nature but a gracious gift from God. Elizabeth pauses and it's Mary's turn as she sings with joy, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." As Barbara Brown Taylor notes, Elizabeth and Zechariah are the first to hear Mary's chart-topping song, as churchy songs go, but the song is not just for them. It is also for her, Mary, and for the Mighty One who has done great things for her. It is for Gabriel, who first gave her the good news, and for all who will benefit from it – for the proud and the powerful who will be relieved of their swelling and pompous heads, for the hungry who will be filled with good things, for the rich who will be sent away empty so that they will have room for more than money can buy. Her song is for every son and daughter of Israel who thought God had forgotten the promise to be with them, to love them, and to give them fresh and endless life forevermore.

All of these things were going on inside of Mary, and she was so sure of this truth that she was singing about it ahead of time – not in the future tense but in the past, as if the promise had already come true. If you have never noticed something about prophets, it is that they rarely get their verb tenses straight. That is because part of their gift is being able to see the world as God sees it – not divided into things that are already over and things that have not yet happen, but as an eternally unfolding mystery that surprises everyone... maybe even God. In this divine dance that we are all dancing, God may lead, but it is entirely up to us whether we will follow. Just because God sends an angel to invite one young maiden onto the dance floor is no guarantee that she will say yes. Just because God sends a prophet to tell us how life on earth can be more like life in heaven, does not mean any of us will quit our regular routines to make it so. God acts. Then it is our turn. God responds to us. Then it is our turn again.

The only sure thing in this scenario is that we have a partner who is with us, and for us, and who wants us to have life abundantly. God wants more for us than what is on our Christmas wish list, which is what is wrong with what is called the prosperity

gospel. The prosperity gospel touts that God cares about materialism and wants to give us stuff to make us happy. God is wiser than that. God recognizes happiness is fleeting, predictable, and conditional, depending upon circumstances which are always changing. Joy, on the other hand, is as notoriously unpredictable as the one who bequeaths it. It is made real through God and is filled with miracles, wholeness, and endless blessings. Mary's trust in that fact is really all she has in this moment. She doesn't know what Joseph's response will be, she doesn't have the gifts of medical technology to assure her, there is no medical insurance to protect her and her baby. Without a sonogram or a husband or a sworn affidavit from the Holy Spirit saying, "This sacred child is mine. Now leave the poor girl alone," all Mary has is her willingness to trust God. She believes that the God who has chosen her will be part of whatever happens next – and that, apparently is enough to make her burst into song. She doesn't wait to see how things will turn out first; she sings ahead of time, and all the angels with her. If there is any big changes going on with you right now – if something is underway you cannot predict the end of, and your stomach is rolling with your own version of morning sickness, then Mary's story might be a lead in the right direction. Who knows? Maybe the Holy Spirit has come upon you. Maybe that shadow hanging over you is the power of the Most High. While it would certainly be nice to have some details about how it will all turn out, that is not really necessary, is it? You know how God has gotten you through things in the past... you know what happens when people say, "Yes, thank you. I'd love to dance." Given all of that, I don't know why we would wait to get excited until we know for sure how it will all turn out. We can dare to get out on the dance floor before the band leader even shows up. When it comes to God's promises, we can start singing ahead of time, as if it has already happened. May your souls magnify the Lord, and your spirits rejoice in God your Savior. For God has looked with favor on you, the Mighty One has done great things for you, and holy is God's name. Amen.