

Emmanuel Parish
Kirke White
Sermon for December 20, 2009
Advent 4 Year C
Micah 5:2-5; Psalm 80; Hebrews 10:5-10; Luke 1: 39-45(46-55)

We are waiting in hope and wonder through this Advent. We have had sermons on getting our house in order—i.e., John the Baptist’s preaching. Hopefully our hearts and souls are more pure! Now the lectionary writers lead us to think of Mary, her courage and boldness, her obedience and her devotion. She it was who birthed our Lord, and also saw him die on the cross.

In a few minutes we will recite the Nicene Creed which states, that Jesus “became incarnate from the Virgin Mary and was made man.” (BCP, p. 358) In speaking this well-thought out affirmation we may become immunized to the meaning behind these words. Perhaps this Advent is the time to stop and think what is expressed and that it is inexpressible. Maybe for too long we have let the words wash on by and now we are invited to consider deeply their meaning. .

This event which Luke tells is part of the “she-history” of God’s work in the world. What a topsy-turvy sort of thing! And the second actor in this dramatic “she-history” is Elizabeth, a kinswoman, old and barren and outcast. Remember she is married to Zechariah, the priest, who we presume was a faithful man! And yet he was struck dumb when he expressed doubt about Gabriel’s announcement that Elizabeth would become great with child. Scripture tells us she must have been about six months pregnant—getting large we would say. And she and her child shared in this event we call the Visitation because her child jumped when she heard Mary’s voice calling, Hello!”! What craziness is this that the Holy Scriptures give us?

We are faced with the incredible that God’s Son was enfleshed in skin like ours. To what upside-downiness can we compare it? The Bible seems to be replete with such stories! Think of Abraham and Sarah! Think of Hannah the mother of the prophet Samuel! Think of the absurdity of a baby jumping in the womb at the sound of Mary’s

voice? Then think of the intimate whispered exchange as Mary visits with her cousin Elizabeth. AHH! Dr. Luke has done us a marvelous favor in showing the laugh-ability of this theological term called incarnation!

To what does this absurd event point? I hope you can say in your heart, it points to God's plans which are not human plans! It speaks of God's in-breaking into human history to bring God's Kingdom through his dearly beloved Son. Think of it—this is like a young woman in a n African country conceiving a baby, and going to share with her cousin in a journey of four days—a cousin who is wizened and gaunt from years of famine and who has yet conceived. It is in modern terms preposterous!

Then comes Mary's solo part as she sings what we call the Magnificat. One can only imagine that Elizabeth sings too. OH! How exultant this is! Do you catch the spirit? It is like the cancer of normality has the upper hand and yet is thrown down in the very height of its victory.

Mary proclaims in this subversive "Magnificat" what is in her faithfulness already being accomplished! "He has scattered the proud . . . he has brought down the powerful . . . he has lifted up the lowly . . . he has filled the hungry with good things." Now this is not abstract at all is it? It is grounded—we might say embodied because this Savior is in her womb. Think of the wonder of it! Draw deeply into your imagination this image of two women—who have the most wonderful secret in the world! One an outcast because she is not married—one an outcast because she has been barren. Isn't God a surprise? Isn't our faith paradoxical?

Our young president dealt with paradox in the speech he delivered before receiving the Nobel Peace Prize. No matter that we desire peace, yet it seems we have to fight for it! That is in our world, but that is not true in the dimension of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The pretensions of all the great ones in political life, religious life, and economic life are all thrown askew by this Magnificat!

Someone has aptly said that we are fools for Christ—yes verily it is so if we believe and live like it!

Often we have taken the dour theological approach to Mary and her Visitation of Elizabeth. Often we have compared this Magnificat to the other great womanish songs of faith in the Hebrew Scriptures. But there is this side to Dr. Luke's story that we have to learn to appreciate! While the absurd requires of us faith it is our task this Advent to en flesh and embody this spirit as Mary did in her faithfulness! (I am indebted to Charles L. Campbell of Duke University for some of the ideas here.)

In the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit

Amen.