

The Sunday Missive -- December 11, 2022 The Third Sunday in Advent

Hymn 72 Hark! The glad sound

Hark, the glad sound! the Savior comes, the Savior promised long:
Let every heart prepare a throne, and every voice a song.

He comes, the prisoners to release in Satan's bondage held;
The gates of brass before him burst, the iron fetters yield.

He comes, the broken heart to bind, the bleeding soul to cure;
And with the treasures of his grace to enrich the humble poor.

Our glad hosannas, Prince of Peace, thy welcome shall proclaim;
And heaven's eternal arches ring with thy beloved Name.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rABuhE31hxc>

The Collect of the Day

Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Isaiah 35:1-10

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.

They shall see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God. Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, "Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you."

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp, the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way; the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God's people; no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray. No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there. And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

The Song of Mary *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-55)

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord* ***My spirit rejoices in God my Savior***

For he has looked with favor on his lowly servant* ***From this day all generations will call me blessed.***

The Almighty has done great things for me and holy is his Name* ***He has mercy on those who fear him in every generation.***

He has shown the strength of his arm* ***He has scattered the proud in their conceit.***

He has cast down the mighty from their thrones* ***And has lifted up the lowly.***

He has filled the hungry with good things* ***And the rich he has sent empty away.***

He has come to the help of his servant Israel* ***For he has remembered his promise of mercy***

The promise he made to our ancestors* ***To Abraham and his children for ever.***

Praise to the Creator and to the Child and to the Holy Spirit*
The God who was and is and is to come at the end of the ages hallelujah.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EsUWG2axB3w>

James 5:7-10

Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors! As an example of suffering and patience, beloved, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

Hymn 640 Watchman, tell us of the night

Watchman, tell us of the night, what its signs of promise are.
Traveler, o'er yon mountain's height, see that glory-beaming star.

Watchman, does its beauteous ray aught of joy or hope foretell?
Traveler, yes; it brings the day, promised day of Israel.

Watchman, tell us of the night; higher yet that star ascends.
Traveler, blessedness and light, peace and truth its course portends.
Watchman, will its beams alone gild the spot that gave them birth?
Traveler, ages are its own; see, it bursts o'er all the earth.

Watchman, tell us of the night, for the morning seems to dawn.
Traveler, darkness takes its flight, doubt and terror are withdrawn.
Watchman, let thy wanderings cease; hie thee to thy quiet home.
Traveler, lo! the Prince of Peace, lo! the Son of God is come!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OL9-WfgvkQY>

Matthew 11:2-11

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me."

As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written,

'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.' Truly I tell you, among those

born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”

Where Mary Goes -- Advent 3A

The story we tell differs from the opinion of scholars and historians and biologists about the Blessed Virgin Mary. The latter posit that the Virgin Birth is about as likely as that Genesis story of Woman being taken out of Man, or the other one we heard today about Elizabeth, an elderly and previously barren woman getting pregnant. Ours is not a new story, either. Remember Sarah laughing when she heard she was pregnant in old age. She laughed, but Isaac was born. Stories of impossible births had already been treasured for ages in the traditions of the Ancient Near East -- long before the Gospel Evangelist Luke took it up a hundred years after Jesus lived and made it part of our sacred tradition. One could also ask why, if it were factually true as well as amazing, is the Virgin Birth not even mentioned anywhere else in the Gospels. Everywhere else, Jesus is referred to as Mary's son (not even Joseph and Mary's son), and he has siblings. One could also ask why God, whose miracles have occurred in so many ways and places, could not just alter a gene in one humble Palestinian woman, two thousand years ago to make a point: the point of all points. If she could do it for the Honeycomb Grouper and the Ribbon Eel permanently, surely God could do it for us once.

More practical reasons might include the following: Life is a gift of God, not an indication of character. Pregnancy happens in all kinds of ways. People make mistakes. Women are not always in control of their bodies where men are concerned, etc. What is indisputable is that, at some point, Mary became aware that she was going to have a baby. What is important is their

response to the situation. When the angel said her child would be special, Mary rose to the occasion and answered, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” And like his namesake before him down in Egypt land, Joseph was wise and compassionate and loving enough to set aside all else, care for her and make the most of the situation.

Whatever our view of Luke’s Nativity narrative: absolute sacred fact, beautiful sacred myth, or sweetly apocryphal fiction, we can look at what Mary represents, some of the possible meanings of her designation and characterization as the holiest of all of us purely human beings. The irony is that even if the explanation is unwed motherhood, which is often characterized as unsavory or shameful, at the same time, honest and honorable behavior is what makes Mary and her husband stand out for us. “My soul doth magnify the lord. Be it unto me according to God’s will.”

We human beings are not all-wise or all-knowing. The fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil has only made many of us arrogant. God knows we can only- and will always have a dangerously incomplete and fleeting grasp of right and wrong. But we are capable of choosing whether to stand up for what we believe in and trying to do something about it, or waffling to get the upper hand in order to avoid personal consequences like pain, suffering and shame.

Perhaps she was already pregnant, and the Holy Spirit came upon her and said, “Have this baby, it will be beyond good – just do it!” We have Luke’s story about how she got pregnant, and it is a strangely beautiful story. But even if her pregnancy actually started somewhat differently, by an impulsive decision on her part, or an act of violence on some man’s part, it makes no difference. She listened to the best of

her ability to the will of God, she tried her hardest to determine what the best use of her life would be, and she gave everything she had to act accordingly. That's all any of us can ever hope to do. That's why we call her blessed, virginal, sinless.

Mary's choice, her act was, as was John's, an act of heralding as much as assent. The miraculous nature of her motherhood announced the intention of the Creator. Here in Advent as we talk about Mary, we are in the realm of miracles. Her assent may have been just a perfect human choice, but the consequences were miraculous.

For what is promised in the new age is wondrous indeed: The people shall see the glory of the Lord. Weak hands will be made strong, and feeble knees made firm. Goodness knows lots of us are ready for that. The eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; the lame shall leap like deer, and the tongues of the speechless sing for joy. Waters shall break forth in the desert; the burning sand shall become pools of water; A highway shall be there, the Holy Way – and here is the best part – a way where not even fools, shall go astray.

This is Isaiah's description, and Mary's song takes on the mystical power of announcing the future as if it has already come to pass. 'God has shown the strength of his arm, and scattered the proud in their conceit; has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent empty away.' You and I know that these things have not come to pass among us yet. Isaiah goes on: "No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast," which rules out Los Angeles. For us, the Kingdom of God is still a dream. What Mary knows, and what we can learn from her, is that God's Kingdom exists; it is real, and our task is not

to invent it, but simply to allow ourselves to be part of it; to say as she did, “Be it unto me according to your word.”

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.”

Mary’s courageous and faithful decision made her body into an instrument of peace. Indeed, by her example, her precedent, all women everywhere and for all time are enabled to bring into life the humanity of God’s intention. The prophet and the psalmist have described this world; Mary has brought it to life; Jesus embodied it. All that’s left is for us to follow their path.

Honesty in the face of fear is Mary’s gift to us today and always. It alone will allow us to be at peace among ourselves, bring good news to the oppressed, bind up the brokenhearted, proclaim liberty to the captives, and comfort all who mourn. Only then shall we greatly rejoice and our whole being exult. Only then shall we be clothed with the garments of salvation and covered in robes of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, as a bride adorns herself with jewels. For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, thus would the Lord God cause righteousness to spring up from all women, everywhere..

Hymn 66 Come thou long expected Jesus

Come, thou long-expected Jesus born to set thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in thee.

Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the earth thou art:
Dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.

Born thy people to deliver, born a child, and yet a king,
Born to reign in us for ever, now thy gracious kingdom bring.

By thine own eternal Spirit rule in all our hearts alone;
By thine all-sufficient merit, raise us to thy glorious throne.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KZY0e5Uux8I&t=45s>

Theotokos

You bore for me the One who came to bless
And bear for all and make the broken whole.
You heard His call and in your open 'yes'
You spoke aloud for every living soul.
Oh gracious Lady, child of your own child,
Whose mother-love still calls the child in me,
Call me again, for I am lost, and wild
Waves surround me now. On this dark sea
Shine as a star and call me to the shore.
Open the door that all my sins would close
And hold me in your garden. Let me share
The prayer that folds the petals of the Rose.
Enfold me too in Love's last mystery
And bring me to the One you bore for me.

Malcolm Guite