

Devotions – December 15-21, 2019
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Sunday, December 15, 2019

Text: Luke 1:46-55

- 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 lowliness 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 ***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 thoughts 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 helped his servant Israel,***
in remembrance of his mercy,
⁵⁵ ***according to the promise he made to our ancestors,***
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

Up to this point, John the Baptist has been the key player in the season of Advent. As we enter the last week of Advent, Mary captures the spotlight. Next Sunday we will hear Matthew’s account of the angel’s instructions to Joseph: *“Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins”*, as well as Isaiah’s prophecy, *“Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel.”* Luke brings Mary front and center by presenting the Magnificat, Mary’s song of praise in response to this incredible announcement. Mary is still stunned by the angel’s announcement, *“Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God,”* and by her cousin Elizabeth’s greeting, *“Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.”* In amazement, Mary bursts forth in a song of praise and wonder.

This week we will explore Mary’s journey of faith and discovery as the meaning of her song takes hold of her life. For now, meditate on Mary’s wonder-filled song. Read it quietly to yourself. Read it aloud. Even sing it, if you desire. Absorb it’s meaning. Let it speak to you and for you as you contemplate the wonder of God’s gift of a Savior.

Let us pray: *Gracious heavenly Father, as we reflect on Mary's song, may our souls rise within us to magnify you as our Lord and our spirits rejoice in you as our Savior. Amen.*



Monday, December 16, 2019

Text: Mark 12:38-44

³⁸ As he taught, he said, "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, ³⁹ and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! ⁴⁰ They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."

⁴¹ He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. ⁴² A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. ⁴³ Then he called his disciples and said to them, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. ⁴⁴ For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."

In reading this text, I can't get over how much it reflects Mary's words in the Magnificat. What impressed me was its relevance to what Mary proclaimed. As Jesus condemns the religious and civic elite for their boastfulness, their pomposity, and their disregard for the poor and needy, like this humble widow, I can hear Mary proclaiming, "...he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly." As Jesus marvels at the generosity and faith of the poor widow, I can hear Mary proclaiming, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant."

As I read Mark's account of the poor widow, I wonder, how did Jesus know that she gave "everything she had?" It would seem that Jesus may have known this woman, knew her station in life. Some have speculated that she might, in fact, have been Jesus' own mother, Mary. Now that's an interesting possibility to reflect on! Whether this is true or not, the fact remains that Mary was the embodiment of what Jesus said about this widow—"She gave everything she had." Mary did, indeed, give everything she had—she gave her son! Widows then were totally dependent on their sons to care for them and provide for them. They had no security of their own. But throughout her adult life, Mary was faced with one incident after another that taught her that she did not possess her son. She had to, in fact, give him up over and over again.

Let us pray: *Blessed Father, we, too, are amazed by the faith and trust of Mary and the poor widow who gave everything they had. Inspire us to such faith and trust that our lives will burst forth in generosity. Amen.*



Tuesday, December 17, 2019

Text: Luke 2:22-34

²² When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord”), ²⁴ and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. ²⁷ Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

²⁹ “Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; ³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation,

³¹ which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.”

³³ And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, “This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed ³⁵ so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

This may have been Mary’s first experience of giving up her son, symbolized by Simeon taking the infant boy from her and holding him in his own arms. Imagine Mary’s amazement to see this old man lift his eyes to heaven and exclaim, “*Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation.*” What beautiful and glorious words! But then the mood changed. A shiver must have gone through Mary’s spine at the prediction Simeon went on to state: “*This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.*”

Mary got a taste of what Simeon meant when, according to Matthew, she and Joseph were warned by an angel to flee their home in the dark of night and go to Egypt to escape Herod’s

fearful and jealous rage resulting in the slaughter of all the baby boys in and around Bethlehem who were under the age of two.

Let us pray: *Eternal God, we have seen your salvation in the Christ whose incarnate birth we are preparing to celebrate. We hold him in our arms every time we gather with your family of believers for worship, every time we take your word into our hearts and minds, every time the bread and wine are placed in our hands. Thank you for this revelation which is life. Amen.*



Wednesday, December 18, 2019

Text: Luke 2:41-51

⁴¹ Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. ⁴² And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. ⁴³ When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. ⁴⁴ Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵ When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. ⁴⁶ After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷ And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸ When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." ⁴⁹ He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" ⁵⁰ But they did not understand what he said to them. ⁵¹ Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart."

The next event in Mary's parenting we read about was when she and Joseph went to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration when Jesus was 12 years old. Every parent can relate to Mary's combination of relief and anger upon finding her son after a frantic search—of all places, in the temple in dialogue with the religious teachers! Can we also imagine her amazement and confusion at her son's response to her question—"Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" Perhaps this was Mary's first awakening to the fact that her son's allegiance was first and foremost to his heavenly Father. Perhaps the sword old Simeon talked about began to pierce Mary's soul just a little as she learned to give up her Son to God's greater cause.

Let us pray: *Lord God, we have a tendency to want to hold on to Jesus and use him for our purposes. Teach us to let go so he can be free to direct our lives as he chooses. Amen.*



Thursday, December 19, 2019

Text: John 2:1-11

“On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ² Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³ When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” ⁴ And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.” ⁵ His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” ⁶ Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷ Jesus said to them, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸ He said to them, “Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.” So they took it. ⁹ When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom ¹⁰ and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.” ¹¹ Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.”

The next moment of awareness came to Mary at the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry when they attended a wedding celebration in Cana. Mary came to her son to advocate on behalf of the bride and her family when they ran out of wine for the reception expecting that he could do something about it. We don’t have the benefit of hearing voice inflections or seeing facial expressions when we read the Bible, but I can imagine Jesus responding to Mary with a tone of irritation as though to chide her a bit. *“Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.”* Despite his apparent annoyance, Jesus complied with Mary’s request anyway, performing his first known miracle. Here, again, the sword pierced a little deeper into Mary’s soul.

Let us pray: *Dear Father, teach us patience and the wisdom of good timing. Help us not to expect you to do what we want when we want it, but to pray, “Thy will be done.” Amen.*



Friday, December 20, 2019

Text: Matthew 12:46-50

⁴⁶ While he was still speaking to the crowds, his mother and his brothers were standing outside, wanting to speak to him. ⁴⁷ Someone told him, “Look, your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.” ⁴⁸ But to the one who had told him this, Jesus replied, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” ⁴⁹ And pointing to his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! ⁵⁰ For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

Matthew relates this incident later in Jesus’ ministry when Mary and her other children showed up at a house where Jesus was speaking. Concerned that he may be getting himself deeper into trouble, they called for him to leave and come home with them. Imagine Mary’s dismay when the messenger related Jesus’ words to her. This time the *sword* must have pierced deeply into Mary’s *soul*.

Let us pray: *Father in heaven, thank you for the gift of family, especially at this time of the year when families gather together to celebrate the birth of our Savior. Remind us that in baptism you have made us a part of your greater, eternal family—the family of believers—our true and lasting family. Amen.*



Saturday, December 21, 2019

Text: John 19:25-27

“Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, “Woman, here is your son.” ²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

We come now to the end of Jesus’ earthly life and mission. Jesus is dying on the cross on which he was crucified. Mary stands beneath the cross, her soul not only pierced, but broken. Now she is experiencing the ultimate giving up of her son, her everything. But in this terrible moment, Jesus fulfills his final role as a loving and caring son, placing her in the care of John, his beloved disciple. With his final words, *“It is finished!”* and *“Into your hands I commend my spirit,”* Jesus gives up his last breath and Mary gives up everything she has. Her journey as Jesus’ earthly mother is completed. It has been a journey of faith, humility and courage,

a living out of the wonder, submission and devotion she proclaimed in the Magnificat, where our week of devotions began.

Someone observed, "Courage is fear that has said its prayers." Mary must have said her prayers because she showed great courage. Indeed, the Magnificat is a prayer, a prayer in which Mary not only *magnified the Lord*, but humbly and faithfully submitted herself to God's mission of redemption for all people. We honor Mary and fulfill the spirit of her song when we offer ourselves humbly, faithfully, obediently and courageously to God's purpose of loving and redeeming this world and all who inhabit it.

Let us pray: *Gracious and merciful God, as we look forward to celebrating Jesus' incarnate birth this coming week, renew in us an understanding of your divine plan in sending Jesus to be our Savior and Lord. Give us courage to faithfully and obediently witness to your love for this world and all who inhabit it, made evident in your gift of the Christ child. As we receive this gift anew this Christmas, inspire us to give it away in service to others. Amen.*

