

Advent 4 Year C, December 19, 2021 Luke 1:39-56 Epiphany, Winnipeg

There is so much that is so human and so real in this story. Right from the start, Mary's story might ring some bells. Here is a young woman, likely a teenager, since the early teens were considered a marriageable age at the time. She is single but she finds out that she's expecting a child. The circumstances are strange - Mary says she's never been with a man - but this angel comes and tells her that's fine, this will be God's child, and a good thing is happening, because for God nothing is impossible. But even though Mary believes the word of the angel, would the neighbours believe a story like that? What would the neighbours think? So Mary, like so many others over the years with an unexpected pregnancy, rushes off to be with relatives in another place and keeping out of sight for awhile.

There is so much that is so human and so real in this story. Mary goes off to stay with the relatives, and she comes to the house of her distant relative Elizabeth and her husband Zechariah. Now Elizabeth is going to have an unexpected child of her own. The story goes that she and Zechariah should be too old for any children to be coming along – as Luke says, they're “getting on in years” – but an angel has told them that they will have a child, and even though that shouldn't be possible they find out soon enough that it's true! So we find Elizabeth waiting for Mary to arrive. She hears the knock on the door, the door opens and her cousin Mary comes in, and Mary says, “Hi Elizabeth!” And did you hear what happened then? “The child leaped in Elizabeth's womb.” In other words, the kid kicked. And when Elizabeth is booted by the baby she is somehow moved to see that it's not just her cousin at the door but the mother of her Lord who has come to visit. A single soon-to-be mom and a senior soon-to-be mom get

together, and a baby kicks, and good news begins to be spoken.

There is so much that is so human in the story. After Mary and Elizabeth exchange the familiar formalities, and after the strange and unfamiliar news is spoken, Mary starts to sing. Now the song she sings is not something she makes up on the spot. It's a song that was first sung by another woman named Hannah, who was also having an unexpected but welcomed child, about two thousand years before Mary and Elizabeth meet. It's a song they might both know because people have sung it for thousands of years, and maybe Elizabeth could even sing along, just like if someone here started singing "Jesus Loves Me" or "Shine Jesus Shine" or "Come Now is the Time to Worship" or "O Come O Come Emmanuel" and we could all sing along, a little or a lot, because we've heard it so many times. It's so human and familiar to the two of them.

And Mary sings, and her song is all about a God who favours the people that the world might reject. Her song is about a God who blesses the ones we might say are cursed; who pulls down the powerful ones and raises up everyone who was thought to be weak; who sees that the hungry are fed and filled and who sends the full ones away because they've had their fill and don't need any more. Her song is about real things in the real world, and it's about that world being turned upside down and what is wrong being made right. It's a song about a God who pulls down empires. And we sing that song, or maybe just speak it and hear it like we did today, just like so many have sung and spoken and heard it for thousands of years. Out of that small meeting, so human and so real, in an out-of-the-way place way back there, we hear a song that is still being sung about a God who is still promising to make right all that has gone wrong with our politics and

economics and relationships.

And it's all so human and so real.

I think we sometimes get stuck on the miracles we might hear about during this whole season. We wait for the miracle of God being born in human flesh. Miraculous visits of angels who announce miraculous births, and miraculous visions of angels singing and lighting up the sky.

But the real miracles are the things we might not even notice. Martin Luther said that the real miracle for Mary is simply that she believed that she was blessed, and that the world would be blessed through the child that she carried. The miracle is that she believed, she trusted. The miracle is that two unknown women met and great news was spoken; a baby kicked and Elizabeth knew that God was in town; lowly shepherds on the night shift would be next to hear the news, and a baby, looking like just a baby, would be the life of the world...come into the world, coming into the world again...

This next week... We don't know what this next week will be like do we? We never do know, but it seems like everything has shifted again and it almost feels again like it did in March and April 2020. It might be a boring week like any other, it might be a week where everything goes strange again. Remember something this week about the small things, just the real and human things that we've heard about today: A small family reunion, a kicking baby, a song that everybody knows. Remember something this week about these small things, and how in these small things good news is spoken about a world gone wrong being

made right again. Good news about the living God being present right there, as close as can be, when a couple of people get together to catch up and keep each other company. Unexpected news from the smallest of people in the most surprising of places – the hill country, a pasture, a stable, a mall, a church.

And just go through this week with your eyes and ears open. For in things that are so real and so human God speaks an old old song of hope. In things so real and so human, just everyday meetings we have, good news will be spoken and heard; healing will get its foot in the door; justice will peak through a crack in the wall. In things so real and so human and so everyday that they're unexpected you might just feel the child kick inside and you and I and we all will say, "Yes. The promise is still true. God is with us right here."

AMEN.