

Mt Carmel UMC                      December 24, 2023                      Fourth Sunday of Advent  
"Christmas Is Life-Changing" - Luke 1:46-55 - Rev. Jeffrey B. Childs

You may not be aware, but there are not Christmas stories in all four of the Gospels. Mark and John do not say anything about it. Though John has a flowering way of telling his readers that Jesus is the Word of God from the beginning and that the Word became flesh and dwelled among us! The birthday stories we have are from Matthew and Luke. Matthew tells Joseph's side of the story and Luke here tells Mary's version. Luke tells us of the angel visiting Mary and the shepherds. Matthew tells of angels showing up in dreams to Joseph and to the wisemen. If you do not know your Bible as well as you wish you did, please join us in a Bible study this year or in the reading through the Bible program we will be starting on January 1. We will make 2024 the year of the Bible!

The message we heard from Mary here in Luke 1 is called the *Magnificat* which is Latin for the word that Mary "magnifies" the Lord. To help us with the perspective for this morning we will back up a few verses in Luke when Mary arrives at her cousin Elizabeth's house and there Elizabeth does not magnify God but glorifies Mary. For Christians, in both the Catholic and Orthodox traditions, the Virgin Mary is glorified. She is lifted up as blessed or "highly favored." Do you know the "Hail Mary?" No, not the desperate play at the end of a football game when the quarterback heaves the ball into the end zone praying that one of the receivers will catch it and win the game. I mean the prayer offered by our Catholic brothers and sisters when they pray the rosary: *Hail Mary, full of grace. Our Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.* The prayer closely follows the text of what has preceded our story this morning. The focus there is Elizabeth lifting up and praising her cousin Mary, but in the text this morning, Mary glorifies God. So, what do you glorify? There are many to choose from – football or other sports with star athletes, movie stars, rock stars, expensive presents, elaborate parties, etc. When I was in MN, I came across a little church cook book with a great title, "They Glorify Mary, We Glorify Rice." I checked out the recipe today. You take rice and add pineapple, cherries, marshmallows and whipped cream. You go from plain old rice to "glorified" rice: Rice that will get rave reviews. Here is the first question to ponder today: **By what we say, believe and do, how might we glorify God today?**

Using Mary's words here I now see Isaiah's prophesy and John the Baptist's preaching in a new light. (Reread vs. 52 *He has pulled the powerful down from their thrones and lifted up the lowly.*) Mary sees Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection as a world changing experience. We read in the scriptures during the last 2 weeks from Isaiah and John the Baptist literally about valleys being lifted up and mountains made low, but Mary saw lowly people lifted up and the high and mighty brought down a peg or two.

I am wondering if the prophets have been speaking metaphorically about the same thing. Jesus seemed to preach that same thought in the Beatitudes and his often-remarked description of *the first being last and the last being first.* (Luke 13:30) But the best example in scripture may have come following Paul's preaching in Thessalonica when an angry mob exclaimed to the city authorities, *These people who have been turning the world upside down have come here also,* (Acts 17:6) The early Christian church was telling people about God and Jesus and that people did not need to worship or glorify anything else especially any other idols. The key question today is: **How has following Christ changed your life?**

Life changes all the time but there are some big moments that make drastic changes. Mary could relate to the change of having a baby. That will change your life forever! How about getting married, moving to a new community, Mary and Joseph could relate! The death of a spouse, a parent or especially a child is life changing! Encountering God, experiencing the loving presence of the holy, this too changes lives. For the Apostle Paul a blinding conversion on the road to Damascus changed his life. (Read Acts chapter 9.) Putting God first in your life will change your whole world view, especially if you always had put yourself in first place. If that's the case, quit trying to glorify yourself, and glorify God. Alleluia and Amen.

**Hear in Mary's Magnificat**

Rev. Jeffrey B. Childs 12/14/23

Hear, in Mary's Magnificat,  
Her life rearranging,  
Through Christ the world has been upset.  
Christmas is life changing.

The lowly people are lifted.  
The mighty are brought low.  
The world is both blessed and gifted,  
By God whose blessings flow.

Mary was changed by Jesus' birth,  
And by all Christ would do.  
And Jesus birth changed all the earth.  
How has Jesus changed you?

For all that God has done for us,  
Let us our faith renew,  
And glorify God this Christmas,  
By what we say and do.

As we approach this next new year,  
We've an opportunity.  
What difference might we make here?  
Through Christ who might we be?