

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

December 22, 2024



BLESSED

the joy in being entrusted

by Drew Downs

When Mary, mother of God, visits her cousin while they are both improbably pregnant, Elizabeth declares that Mary is blessed. That she is “blessed among women” implies that hers is a greatest of blessings. I can imagine a whole lot of women today and throughout history would be less than eager to have such a lofty position if carrying the Messiah for ninth months, only to famously give birth away from home were the cost of such respect and honor.

Perhaps it is that word, blessed—and our vision of it is as great, happy even. Not just privilege or specialness, but something joyful and beneficial. Blessing is often seen as wealth and abundance rather than bearing responsibility. But there is joy in that, too, isn't there? In being chosen for an important job, not just a fun one. And in preparing the way for the Messiah, in all of his work. It is easy to see this as important. But the blessing and joy are often there, too; for the finding.

ADVENT

2024

WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

Greening the Church

This Sunday, we commence in the process of preparing the church for Christmas we call "the greening of the church." We take the name for the live greens we use to decorate our worship space. It is a festive time and one full of memories and connections.

Like all good traditions, it is full of joy and, for some, a small amount of frustration (how else can we speak to the human experience?). We have expectations, visions, a task list. Things need doing. We need help (do we ask for it?). Visions need making real (do we share them?). Heck, we even have expectations for being given work to do, which is work itself—coming up with tasks and organizing them! This all can feel like a lot when we think it is a lot. But we don't have to see it that way. Nobody is forcing us to. We could see it instead as opportunity and fun: blessing. We can embrace the spontaneity of creativity and with the reminder that there is so rarely a "wrong way". In fact, wrong ways are so scarce, the likelihood of finding them is infinitesimally small. **You have a far greater chance of lucking into something beautiful when you try!**

Each year, we gather two or three days before Christmas to decorate and feast. We stream Christmas music, decorate, eat a potluck meal, and prepare for the big feast of the Incarnation.

Join us Sunday, December 22 after the 10:00 service for fun and blessing.

With love,
Drew

ADVENT

2024

FOR SUNDAY

Advent 4C

December 22, 2024

Collect

Purify our conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that your Son Jesus Christ, at his coming, may find in us a mansion prepared for himself; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Reading

Luke 1:39-45(46-55)

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

[And Mary said,

"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.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.
His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm;

he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

ADVENT

He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever."]

Reflection

The gospel of Luke opens with an interwoven story of two women: one too young to wear a crown, the other too old. And yet they are both called by God to serve humanity—unexpectedly and incredibly.

I suspect we take the remarkable for granted—the part in which God has recruited this family, we totally get, and the incredible ask, yes, and certainly the whole Jesus mission is big. All of that we are down for. Heck, there's a popular song, "Mary did you know?" about the enormity of all of this, so I think we do hold this all in an appropriate level of tension. But the part of this remarkable act that I think we tend to take for granted is the substance of that enormity—what that *actually* means, looks like, and how it impacts how we might see our world.

When Mary visits her cousin and Elizabeth reports how her son, in utero, responded to the presence of Mary and of *his* cousin-to-be, what is her response? To sing a song we call the Magnificat. A song about the transforming of the world's *order*. We should consider this against the easier frame of transforming the world's *spirit*. That it isn't *only* about a heart change, but a systemic change.

Mary describes this vision as good news, worthy of God's grace, a blessing upon her, and something for which she is totally unworthy. But that isn't going to stop her from accepting the call. There's bravery there alongside the humility. Something beautiful and full of great hope. Not merely for herself, but for the world.

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