

Sermon

Year B Advent 3

12.17.23

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

Good morning, St. Dunstan Family!

There is joy radiating throughout our scriptures for today.

Our Old Testament reading says from Isaiah, in v. 10

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD,

my whole being shall exult in my God;

Then from our epistle reading (I Thessalonians 5) encourages us to

<sup>16</sup>Rejoice always!

Joy radiates throughout the season.

And joy radiates today! Yes! JOY!

Today is the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Advent also known as Gaudete which means **rejoice**. Gaudete Sunday is a counterpart to Laetare Sunday in Lent. The liturgical color is pink.

It provides a similar break about midway through a season and is penitential in nature.

*Gaudete in Dominio* means rejoice in the Lord, and it is the first of the part of the Magnificat also known as Mary's song.

Mary's poetic statement of praise found in Luke 1:46-55.

This morning our lectionary substituted for this Canticle, The Song of Mary, in our prayer book, found on p.91 instead of the usual Psalter.

The 'Song of Mary' is also known as a prayer. Many prayers have turned into songs. It is traditionally called the Magnificat, which is the first part of the Latin translation of this text. There is a long history of using of the Magnificat in Christian liturgy and as a text in choral music.

Later on in Jesus' ministry, his disciples asked him **how** they should pray. In the Gospels, Jesus taught his disciples how to pray through what we call **The Lord's Prayer**, or the

**‘Our Father’**. It is **the** most beloved of all Christian prayers. We say it every Sunday in our services. No doubt the early followers or disciples of Jesus said this exact same prayer.

Let’s take pause for a moment with the word **-disciple**...

Disciple means- a follower/ a devotee/ or devoted student of a teacher.

It is where we get our word, **discipline**, which comes the Old French via Latin ‘disciplina’-

Each Sunday, we read a Gospel passage. Often, we listen to a story pertaining to Jesus’ teachings specifically offering instruction to his inner circle of the 12 followers/ or 12 disciples.

This got me thinking about the early disciples.

Then I started wondering who the earliest or original disciple was. The “OG.”

**The “OG.”**

Ready for some pop culture?

Today, "OG" means "original," according to Merriam-Webster, the term is used to describe...

“someone or something that is the original or originator, particularly if said person or thing is very respected or highly regarded.”

The question arose...**who was the original or OG disciple of Jesus, God Incarnate?**

The original follower of Jesus -was a woman, a young woman named....Mary. His mother!

She believed before any human on earth that Jesus was the Son of the Most High, the Messiah.

She followed his every movement before he could even breathe.

Her initial encounter with the Christ caused her to burst into song.

That is the song called the Magnificat.

It celebrates both the personal and the communal. The Magnificat falls into two sections. (Luke 1:47-50, Luke 1:51-55).

First the personal and then it shares broader social perspective on what God is doing.

Mary begins by celebrating what God has done for her personally.

It is personal because it begins with the focus solely on how Mary feels internally.

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

Soon the prayer recognizes God's choice of her—a person of low status—

“for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.”

See, this statement represents in miniature, what God is doing for the poor and powerless, the marginalized, in general.

The first part of the Song of Mary celebrates the surprising choice of a girl of low status for the honor of bearing the Messiah.

This is quite consistent with how our God works. Remember what I usually say in all of my sermons: our God is countercultural. Often, God does the opposite of what the culture does.

You see there is an immense gap in status between the “lowliness” of the girl and “the Mighty One” who has chosen her, enhancing the wonder of the event.

“For he that is mighty has magnified me,  
and holy is his Name.”

After the first section we move to section two. It shows that God's choice of a girl of low status bearing the Messiah is representative of what God is doing in society on a larger scale. She sings how God is intervening to bring down oppressors and lift **up** the socially humiliated and poverty stricken, the outsiders, interlopers, the unwanted.

The Magnificat is the other precious Christian prayer, one that is not nearly as well known or practiced as the Lord's Prayer.

Yet, this is the prayer placed inside the heart of Mary.

Remember that this specific episode was written more than eighty years **after** the event took place.

Mary's words were significant to those early readers just as they are significant to us today. They are words which continue to thank and praise God.

Today we not only celebrating Gaudete Sunday by thinking about the word JOY, Mary, and her Magnificat but we also recognize this pink candle as the **Shepherd's candle**. I did a little research about Shepherds.

Shepherding was a common occupation in the ancient Near East. Shepherds would have been readily understandable to the earliest biblical audiences.

Since the seventh millennium B.C.E., humans have domesticated sheep and made use of their meat, milk, and wool.

They have long been integral to the economy of ancient Palestine.

By the time Jesus was born, the population of Palestine had swelled under Roman rule. A vast majority of the people made their livings through animal husbandry or agriculture.

Much of the visual imagery of the nativity story such as the fields surrounding the villages was familiar to the early writer's audience. The shepherds in the nativity account emphasize Jesus' humble origins, since sheep herding was considered unskilled labor and was relegated to the lower strata of society. Yet we know throughout Scripture that God has a tender heart for the marginalized, for shepherds. Look at the beloved Psalm 23, "The Lord is my Shepherd."

It's just like our God to approach a simple handmaiden and a ragged group of sheep herders with an angelic voice and a heavenly presence.

Mary and the Shepherds. A pure-hearted, simple young girl and a group of perhaps coarse, burley men

Can you think of any more diverse group to compare and contrast?

Yet, their response was quite similar.

Pure joy!

And as for the Shepherds:

What seems most incredible... that an entire host of angels was sent to announce to the shepherds the good news.

Mary met with only a single angelic messenger.

But the shepherds... they got to experience an entire "myriad" of the heavenly host. The "glory of the Lord" shines all around them.

Angels MUST be rather imposing creatures. Every time one is near the first things it says...

"Don't be afraid."

Absolutely they felt fear. I don't know about you, but I would be scared spitless!

You could feel the angelic energy lighting up the entire sky.

But quickly that fear dissipated and turned into radical joy. They literally run the distance from the fields to town to find the source of all JOY!

Mary burst into song!

Have you ever been so happy, so full of joy that you wanted to sing?

The Shepherds used their entire bodies as they 'made haste' - they leaped, skipped, danced, and ran to find the source of this newfound JOY!

Whether it's through a song, a prayer, verbal or visual, whether it's by dancing, shouting, running, riding, swimming, rolling or whatever you choose to do,

My hope for you in this season of Advent and for any season: that you will find that placing your hope in Jesus, acknowledging Jesus as God Incarnate is the source for continuous joy, not only for today but for always.