

***Servant Leader***

Meditation on Luke 1:46b-55

Third Sunday in Advent

Dec. 17, 2017

Merritt Island Presbyterian Church

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*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 for ever.'*

Last Sunday, we did something that we had never done before. We hosted our preschool Christmas program during our regular morning worship service, instead of on a weeknight. In addition to our congregation, the sanctuary was packed with parents, grandparents and siblings! Wasn't it great to have so many pews filled up? Maybe they sat in your seat—but I

know you warmly welcomed them and helped them feel comfortable—because they told me how welcomed they felt. They came to hear and see their little angels sing “Jingle Bells,” a Spanish color song with symbols of the season, and the traditional “Away in a Manger.” Soon, we began our unrehearsed “Paper Bag” pageant. This was the first time some of our members experienced the pageant that we have, for the last two years, done only at the early service on Christmas Eve.

Well, Mason began to play, “O Come, O Come Emmanuel” on the piano, but no prophets came forward to our chancel Nativity scene. I worried that folks might be confused about what they were supposed to do or were too shy to come up. I needn’t have worried! The hiccup was that no one, when they chose their simple costume in the Narthex, had chosen to be a prophet. Everyone wanted to be a star or an angel, a tree, a lamb, a donkey. No one wanted to be a shepherd, either, it turns out. So the sheep, said sheep, Jim and Jan McConnaha, ran wild!

We will have some wonderful memories from last Sunday’s pageant. Little, 4-year old Hannah, in our VPK class, got to be Mary. What an honor to chosen to be Mary! She was so excited that she practically ran up the aisle to the stable. I was really glad she wasn’t carrying a real baby when she stumbled and dropped her doll.

Hannah’s grandma told me afterwards that she was so moved with emotion throughout the service, she couldn’t stop crying. She couldn’t put on her costume and come to the stable because she was crying so hard. Other parents and grandparents were crying happy tears, too—and not just because their little ones were in a pageant. The Spirit of God touches us in

worship, drawing us closer to the manger— to see what God has done and hear the promise of who we will become.

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Today's reading, "Mary's Song," follows Gabriel's announcement to Mary and her coming to Elizabeth, an older "relative," miraculously pregnant with her first child in her old age. "For nothing," the angel tells Mary, "will be impossible for God."

This song is Mary's joyful response to the prophecy of Elizabeth—and for being chosen by God for a unique role. Elizabeth feels greatly honored and happy by Mary's visit, but also surprised. "And why has this happened to me," she asks, "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..."

Studying this chapter, I am struck, at first, that the angel has sent Mary to an older relative out in the hill country of Judea, instead of having her stay with her parents in their hometown of Nazareth. But then I recall what Jesus says in Luke 4 after he preaches at the synagogue in Nazareth early in his ministry—and is rejected. "No prophet," he says, "is accepted in the prophet's hometown."

Presumably, Mary's family doesn't know what has happened, yet, and when they do, they won't see her pregnancy in a positive light. They will share in her disgrace-- the dashing of every young girl's dreams in her day and age.

But God has given young Mary a mature faith. She trusts in him. "Here am I," she says, "a servant of the Lord, let it be with me according to your

word.” God has given her another valuable gift in her relationship with Elizabeth. The older woman, a descendant of Aaron and wife to Zechariah the priest, also possesses a strong faith. The prophetess will be Mary’s encourager, a mentor during the first 3 months of her pregnancy. Elizabeth tells Mary, over and over, what others will not understand--that she is, “blessed.” “Blessed are you among women,” she says. “And blessed is the fruit of your womb! ... And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.”

Mary agrees that she has found favor with God. She says, “Surely, from now on, all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty one has done great things for me.”

She understands that although she has been chosen for a special work, this work isn’t about her. She has been chosen to be the mother of the one who will bring about a transformation in all of society, which was as unjust then as it is today. She doesn’t complain about the sacrifices she will be required to make—beginning with her good reputation ruined by the disgrace of her pregnancy. Because of the Lord’s choosing her—a nobody in her world, “lowly” by her own admission-- she will experience great joy, but also suffering and sorrow beyond measure.

But now, before Christ’s birth, young Mary is inspired by a beautiful vision of a just, peaceful future that the Lord has given her. She chooses joy and not fear or despair. She chooses obedience to God so that “the proud will be scattered in the thoughts hearts,” the rich and powerful will be “brought down from their thrones,” the poor will be “lifted up” and the hungry “filled with good things.” This God is one with whom she has a

personal relationship.

“**My** Spirit rejoices in God **My** Savior,” she says. “My Soul magnifies the Lord.”

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Today, after worship, we will elect new deacons and elders to lead our congregation. We are blessed! We have many folks being called to serve who have never been ordained a deacon or elder before! Here are some of our elder and deacon candidates. As we seek God’s will for our leadership, it is fitting to have Mary’s humble, faithful servant leadership example before us. But also, to have Elizabeth’s humble, faithful example as an encourager and support for those who serve. Those who say “yes” to God’s plans and serve as deacons and elders, like Mary, need our prayers, encouragement and support. They need our help as they minister and seek the Lord for His will for the Church. This work of love may involve sorrow and sacrifice, but also joy as God gives them a vision for our future. Please be kind to them. Trust that the Spirit will guide them. Lift up your church and your leaders in prayer! Remember the power of your words to help and heal or to wound. Remember that you will help your Church when you nurture your own faith and relationship with the Lord through worship, prayer, and meditating on scripture.

Let us also remember that deacons, elders and pastors don’t just work *on behalf of* the congregation. They are called to invite the Church into deeper involvement and increased participation in the ministries of MIPC. In short, they serve to help equip and motivate us to follow Christ more closely, giving of our time, talents and resources to grow the Church.

So whether you are serving as a deacon, pastor or elder, or simply as a faithful, active member, let us be like Elizabeth and say to one another “Blessed are you who believe in the fulfillment of God’s promises!”

And may we also be like Mary, and respond to God’s call, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord.” “For the Mighty One has done great things for us!” “Our Spirits rejoice in God our Savior!” “Our souls magnify the Lord.”

Let us pray.

Holy One, we thank you for your example of Mary and Elizabeth—servant leaders—who didn’t question your need for them to work for your good plan for the salvation of the world. Thank you for your love and for sending your Son to dispel the darkness—within and around us. Thank you for bringing the children and families to us last Sunday and for all the joy we experienced. Draw them and us closer to you. Stir us to experience that joy and anticipation of your good gifts every day of our lives! Teach us to be patient as we walk this journey of faith together. Shape us into your humble, servant leaders and grateful, obedient followers. Help us to trust in you. In Christ we pray. Amen.