



The Magnificat: The Manger and the Cross
2nd in the Advent sermon series "The Hymns of Advent"
Luke 1:47-55

4th Sunday of Advent, Sunday, December 22nd, 2019
First Federated Church of Peoria, Illinois
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Mary's song, The Magnificat, reminded me of a painting by Bjorn Thorkelson. It is a Nativity. In the hues of night lit only by the light of window sits a straw filled manger. Lying across the manger there is a shadow, the shadow of a cross. In Mary's Magnificat the Manger and the Cross go hand in hand.

When the messenger angel Gabriel told Mary that she was going to be the mother of the longed for, prayed for messiah, he also gave her a sign. Her kinswoman Elizabeth, who was well beyond child-bearing years, was in her sixth month. She, too, was going to bear a son. The fate of their two sons would be intricately woven together by the hand of God. As soon as Gabriel departed, Mary went to Elizabeth--to see if the angel and his message were true or just a dream.



Upon entering Zachariah and Elizabeth's home, Mary greeted her kinswoman, and Elizabeth was immediately filled with the Holy Spirit. With a loud cry of joy she said to Mary,

Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord." (1:42-45)

Mary responded with the words that inspired composers through the centuries.

My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

In Mary's song we see the outline of Jesus' ministry.

God's mercy is upon those who fear him
from generation to generation.
With the strength of his arm
he scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
He 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 (vv. 50-53)

Notice that the Magnificat is filled with past tense verbs. With the birth of Mary's child the world is turned upside down. With the birth of Jesus a new world order is breaking into a world filled with darkness. A new kingdom, God's Kingdom is also born.

Throughout his life Jesus exposed the proud and self-righteous for who they really were.

He demonstrated the power of a love that has no strings attached.

He advocated for justice and mercy and peace, real peace not the cessation of hostilities that too often passes for peace but really breeds resentment, sabotage, and passive-aggressive behavior.

Jesus identified with the least, the last, the lost, the forgotten, and the forsaken. He filled them with hope.

Like the Old Testament prophets he denounced the wealthy who oppressed the poor and vulnerable.

He called upon those who would take his teachings seriously to deny themselves, pick up the cross, and follow him.

Rich fools and rich rulers walked away from Jesus empty but the hungry he fed on a hillside with only a few loaves.

This is the Jesus of the Manger. But there is also the Jesus of the Cross.

When Jesus was presented at the Temple eight days after his birth, a "righteous and devout man" who looked for "the consolation of Israel", a man named Simeon was filled with the Holy Spirit at the sight of the baby Jesus. Taking the babe in his arms he lifted his eyes toward heaven and said, "Lord, not let your servant depart in peace, for I have seen your salvation. ... a light to the Gentiles, and a glory to Israel." (Luke 2: 29-32)

Turning to Mary Simeon said, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, ... a sword shall pierce your soul... (vv. 34, 35)

The songs of Advent and the carols of Christmas will give way to the Cross of Calvary. There is an interesting thing in Bjorn Thorkelson's painting. Both the manger and the shadow of the Cross are empty. Neither Christmas nor Good Friday have the last word. Death and Despair never have the last word. Easter does. "Because I live, you shall live also," (John 14:19)

But how do we live? If we are to take Jesus seriously we are called to walk in his footsteps. We are lift up the lowly and fill the hungry with good things. Like Mary, we are to respond to God's claim on our lives with these words, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."

To God be the glory. Amen.