

Waiting for Jesus

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Advent 4, Mary's song – Waiting for Jesus

Today, we lit the candle for Mary, the mother of Our Lord. But today's Gospel was all about Joseph. But you might remember that last week, in place of a Psalm, we had the Magnificat, Mary's song. Our third hymn today is based on that song. It comes in the part of Luke's Gospel where Mary, a young woman engaged to be married, was visited by an angel; just like Joseph was today. The angel told Mary she'd have a special baby who was to be called Jesus. Mary's immediate response was to say, I am the Lord's servant, ... may it be to me as you have said.' Lk 1. 38

That's an amazing reaction; and there's more, too. When Gabriel told Mary she'd soon be Jesus' mother, he also said her elderly cousin, Elizabeth, was also expecting a baby in a few months. Mary may already have known that. But the way Gabriel gave both bits of information together clearly linked the two babies' destinies. Mary twigged to this, and she headed off to visit Elizabeth in Judea; about a 100 km journey! It's a decisive beginning to her discipleship, setting out to visit Elizabeth. ... Mary's obedience...I am the Lord's servant... and immediately acting on Gabriel's message is vindicated when she reaches Elizabeth's house. 41 filled with the Holy Spirit ...42 [Elizabeth] exclaimed: "Blessed (eulogemene – praised by people) are you among women, and blessed (eulogemenos) is the child you will bear!"

Mary responded to God's prompting by going to see Elizabeth. Elizabeth also responded to the prompting of the Spirit. She prophesied that Mary was blessed by people because of what was happening to her, but she was blessed in God's sight because she believed (v.45 where she uses the word makaria- receiving

God's favour) 'blessed is she that believed...' Mary responded to Elizabeth's prophecy with the joyous canticle of praise we shared last week. Mary's words and actions model what to do as we wait for Jesus; the song of the prophet Mary models the way we should pray as we wait.

We are commanded to pray and to proclaim the kingdom; Mary's Song is a model of prayer and testimony. (Memory aid, our 3rd hymn TiS 173) It begins with an impulsive outburst of Mary's wonder and delight. 'My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord: and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour...' Soul and spirit are the deepest level of Mary's being. She's saying there's nothing more important in her life than her relationship with God. So too with us: this is the absolute heart of prayer.

Then Mary gives her testimony. The most miraculous discovery of all for anyone getting to know God better in prayer can often be the realization that God actually cares deeply for us. That's often obscured by personal tragedies, but it's true.

Like Mary, the moment we sense the love of the God who created and sustains the whole universe—that God loves us—we're overcome with awe, and we break out into joyful praise. Mary declares that she will be known for ever as one who's received God's favour (makaria); she's been called to join in God's work.

Prayer and testimony; it's vital for us to pray and proclaim, because both open us up to God's perspective, and bring that to others. That's what Mary does—she chooses to open herself to God's perspective by praying the way she does. She does this by dwelling on three things about God. God is the Mighty One; God is Holy; and God is Merciful. This is the God she knows; this is the God we know too.

Mary cries out about God the mighty one in relationship to herself—[who 'has done great things for me']—proclaims God's holiness—proclaims God's love and care for all of humanity in

all time. This links the personal, loving God that Mary knows with the God of Israel; the God she's learnt to know as the merciful and just ruler over all. With this perspective, Mary teaches us about prayer, and about our relationship with God. We don't just relax in God's embrace, trust to his love, and ignore the rest of humanity. No, Mary sees God's concern for people everywhere, and teaches us by word and obedience that God's concerns must be ours too.

The God we meet in Mary's song is a God who is involved—a God who acts with mercy and with justice. God is described time and again the same way through the Hebrew Scriptures. God's acts are at once vigorous, political and tender. God is a fire cleansing us of petty conceits; God is disgusted by oppression and determined to oppose it; God is passionate for the welfare of the lowly, and longs for the starving to be fed. We open our hearts to this perspective when we pray Mary's song. And with such a transformed perspective, we proclaim it fearlessly and, as God's servants, we model transformative justice and compassion in our own lives.

Mary declares in the final part of her song that God is trustworthy; God doesn't change. The promises God made to people millennia ago remain true for all their descendants forever. Where we see the Church formed of praying, proclaiming, responsive disciples waiting and preparing for Jesus to come again, we see all the marvellous things about God that Mary proclaimed happening amongst us.

Mary's prophetic song is a wonderful model for us of prayer and proclamation. Acting on what God says, giving testimony, praying a prayer that resonates with God's heart—these were the right things for Mary to do while she was waiting for Jesus. They're also the right things for us to do as we wait for him to come again.