

## **Magnificat**

Advent 4, Year B

2 Samuel 7:1-11,16; Canticle 15: The Song of Mary;

Romans 16: 25-27; Luke 1:26-38

December 24, 2023; St. Matthew's, Sunbury;

The Reverend Dina Carter Ishler, Priest in Charge

*O come, thou Dayspring from on high,  
and cheer us by thy drawing nigh,  
disperse the gloomy clouds of night,  
and death's dark shadow put to flight.*

*Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.*

**In the name of our God who is Hope, Love and  
Light in the darkness, Amen.**

Beloveds, we have come to the close of this Advent season, this time of watching and waiting and longing for the birth of our infant Savior, our Redeemer. We've talked together during these weeks about how we might prepare the way in this place and in our time for God to be born among us, how we might bear witness to the Light and Love that is God coming into our world. On this fourth and final Sunday in Advent we will pray and

sing and hear readings that bring us right up to this moment- after all, we are almost there, for it is also Christmas Eve morning. Just like our excited children, we know that we are only a few hours away from hearing about shepherds abiding in the fields under the blazing star in the night sky and angels telling us not to be afraid and all the amazement and wonder- everything that rightly belongs to the story of Christmas.

It would be easy to ask ourselves, in this moment- why stay here in Advent any longer- why not just rush ahead to the excitement and joy of Christmas? We did our spiritual work and prepared ourselves as best we could for this Holy Child we have been told is coming- so is there really anything left to do or to say? Beloveds, I think there is. How about if we say ‘**Yes**’- like Mary, the biggest and bravest ‘**Yes**’ that we will ever say. This should not be a quick or an easy decision- after all, it means saying ‘**Yes**’ to sharing in the birth of everything that is holy and true

and loving into our world even when that seems impossible, a ‘Yes’ that shines out like the brightest light and refuses to be overcome even when the darkness around us feels completely overwhelming. If we do say ‘Yes’, like Mary we will need to learn that this Child who brings with him all of God’s love to humanity **can only be born among us when we are at our most human**: that this birth means all our joy, all our heartbreak, all our life’s experiences, indeed, our very souls- will forever be held in the tender and loving embrace of God. ***Mary’s ‘Yes’ to all she will experience is the promise of the Incarnation: that Immanuel, God-with-us, did not come to spare us from being human, but to share in it with us.***

In today’s Gospel, the Archangel Gabriel, straight from Heaven, appears to a young woman named Mary, to tell her that she will conceive a child who will be the long-promised Son of God, to be named Jesus. When Mary gives voice to the unfathomable nature of this:

“How can this be?”, Gabriel explains- and Mary answers with a ‘**Yes**’ which rocks the very foundations of the universe. Long before the actual birth of this child, Mary’s ‘**Yes**’ to Gabriel gives birth to the truth that everything that has been foreshadowed, everything that has been promised throughout the ages about this Holy One who is to come, the Son of the Most High- will indeed be so, and she pledges all of herself to what will be asked of her to help it come to fruition: “*Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.*” Because of this moment, if we too say ‘**Yes**’, this must be our promise also.

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We are so familiar- maybe too familiar- to hearing Mary’s great faithfulness- her acceptance- her submission to God’s will for her life as what is emphasized when she answers the angel: “Let it be with me according to your word.” And all these things are certainly true about Mary and they matter deeply to us when we think about her. But

we cannot let this version of her story disguise the fact that Mary's "yes" is no tame, passive surrender- it is radical and it is daring and it is courageous beyond our imagination. It sets her feet upon a road unlike any she had probably imagined for herself, with what her life would look like completely unknown except for a few strange, confusing hints that made little sense. The sheer magnitude of all that her 'yes' would unleash upon the universe, altering it forever, was something she could not have known until her own life unfolded, day by day- *and so it is with us when we too say 'Yes' to birthing all that is of God into our own place and time.* It is probably just as well that we cannot see the road ahead of us- that we are continually invited as God's people to do the hard work of entrusting everything that we are, including all our tomorrows, to God's ever-present care. We cannot imagine, like Mary, what will be asked of us during our life's journeys- all the places of joy and gratitude and deep love, as well as those places of unwelcome

heartbreak we will experience, the unfathomable grace upon grace that shows up to remind us God is always with us, holding us, sustaining us.

And so perhaps this is the greatest gift of Mary's 'Yes'- and our own: that when we say 'Yes' we proclaim that because God has broken into our weary and heartsore world *it will never be the same again*. When we long for an answer to the "why" of deep pain when it comes as the most unwelcome of gifts, when we long to be swaddled with the mercy and compassion of God so that we and those we love are healthy and whole, we say 'Yes' because we believe that God did not come to erase our suffering *but to be present with us there*. Hearts will still break and light will still struggle to overcome the places of darkness but because of this birth hope has come- healing has come- Love has come- and we have been forever changed.

Just as if we were there on that first holy night- kneeling, wondering, imagining what it could possibly mean to us, we can bring our own gifts of all our human imperfections and longings and raw emotions and utter exhaustion and stubborn clinging to hope and lay them down at the manger, where we find a God who knows what it means to be like us- a God who wants to be with us exactly as we are. In those seasons when it is breathtakingly hard to be human, the delicate balance between pain and love, between sorrow and joy, between longing and fulfillment too much for our mortal selves to bear, Mary's 'Yes'- our own 'Yes'- reminds us we are not alone, but one with the Christ who was born in that long-ago stable, the same Christ who asks us all to birth hope and love anew into our world. *Immanuel, God with us, is the fullness of God's love made human so that we might live, both now and in the age to come, in the fullness of God's unchanging and everlasting love. Amen.*

