

Dreams, Poetry and Songs

Sermon for 30th November 2008

Gospel Reading, Mark 13:24-end and Luke 1:26 – 56

Having heard the gospel reading today, we had better wake up. Today we being told that we must keep watch: We don't know when the Master will return, we are told he will come and ask us what we have done with our assigned tasks. There will be no excuses later. We need to seek the scriptures, interpret for ourselves, do a bit of work on them for ourselves:

Why?

To go there to be moved, to find meaning and purpose, to find our place and a deeper understanding of ourselves and the world, to find hope, to find God and to be changed. Let us begin by reading Luke 1: 26 -56 (see page 4, below).

It's a very familiar story to us. We have heard so many times before. This is the time of year when we start to journey through Advent to Christmas. Advent, to prepare ourselves for the wonderful moment of Christ's birth. This is the time Creation has been waiting for, longing for, and all the scriptures of the Old Testament. Start to prepare in some way for this moment. We need to be careful that we don't miss it among the busy world preparations for Christmas. We do not want to inadvertently miss the significance of this wondrous moment for creation, for ourselves, for the world. Perhaps we need to afford ourselves the opportunity to stop, stare and ponder anew the scriptures as they acquaint us with characters like Zechariah, Elizabeth, Joseph and Mary. Because in their stories, their reactions, and situations, there is something of each of us...Oh yes maybe we haven't thought of it like that. Here are these particular people, standing for us in the benefit of history on the brink of what is for us the New Testament. The good news, the new covenant, but of course they do not know it – we do – its our duty and our joy to allow ourselves to explore this extraordinary world, to look back to the Old Testament and look forward into scripture. To go there to be moved, to find meaning and purpose, to find our place and a deeper understanding of ourselves, the world, to find hope, to find God, to be changed.

Yes I say it again to be changed - we all need to be changed constantly, to draw back to God and his plan for us as individuals, as the body of Christ the Church, corporately as St Faith's.

So in front of you is the scripture, the gospel of Luke. It concerns today Joseph and Mary. Now let us look at this: Last week the Scripture began in the Temple at Jerusalem, in the sanctuary, and an Angel appearing to a Priest, it ended with scene from a house in the hill country in Judea. The new passage is in another house, and an Angel is appearing to Mary. As we read the Scripture it is worth also taking note that

Luke tells us very little of Joseph. Actually, I wanted to mention the notion of doing a little investigation later: That is another way of dressing up the idea of Homework. Now I can hear some minds closing shut!!! However, I think you may be surprised to see the way the Gospel writers have developed our image of these great characters, so may I suggest that over the next week you look at Matthew's opening chapters and the Birth of Jesus, look at verse 18 onwards from chapter 1. It is Joseph who we first hear of, he receives the news from an Angel in a dream! But we are told he has already found out she is expecting a child. When you read this, you will notice that this is Joseph's problem, not Mary's.

Let us look a little deeper into the customs of the day: Marriages in Jewish society took place in two parts, separated by up to a year. First came the betrothal, normally undertaken when the girl was about 12 or 13. It involved a formal exchange in the presence of witnesses of an agreement to marry. From that moment she counted as the man's wife; he had certain legal rights over her, but she would remain in her Father's house. The man could, if he had cause, divorce her but should he die she would be treated as his widow.

So the situation is Joseph's problem to deal with as Matthew narrates it. Now look at Luke's narrative – it is the reverse. Mary takes central stage. But in Matthew, it is Joseph who has messages from God. His righteousness is tested, his obedience required; look how he responds.

Imagine what (as we would say today), the stress he is under, until heaven comes to speak to him, to offer God's way, not the human culture of the time. We are told he is a righteous man and so he is. It is worth looking at Matthew and comparing the two gospels; it builds a wonderful picture for us 2000 years later.

But back to Luke and Mary receives a visit from Gabriel: His opening words 'rejoice'. Joseph is always asleep when Angels speak and so are the Magi, but Zechariah was awake and so is Mary. God speaks to people in the Temple and also in an ordinary home, the ordinary becomes the extraordinary. Suddenly Mary is on Holy ground, near the very heart of God. We hear Mary's response. Take a glance read again for yourself, think what she is saying, look how Gabriel tries to comfort her when she is afraid. He also tells her 'the power of the Holy Spirit will overshadow you'. At the beginning of Acts, Luke talks of the power of the Holy Spirit, coming upon the Disciples, again this word overshadow is used in a description of the Transfiguration. Here the disciples are given a glimpse of heaven. Mary's response and obedience is something we would do well to reflect on this Advent.

Then we move to the next passage, Mary rushes off to see her cousin Elizabeth. It was a journey of about 70 miles! It is then that we learn that in this account, Mary is with child.

Elizabeth and Mary as we see meet and then we have the words of the beautiful poem. We know this as the Magnificat. This is full of phrases from the Psalms, but its main inspiration comes from the Song of Hannah 1 Sam 2. God who reverses people's fortunes, who turns things on their heads. We might well take notice - all things are possible with God, any situation we think is impossible, any we think is hopeless, any we imagine is too vast for us - to comprehend or change, well we know as we read scripture, as Prayer and Faith inspire us, the Holy spirit directs us - all is possible with our Heavenly Father.

Let us pray, we like Mary and Joseph, will do our part as we listen to the word of God.

Acknowledgments:

The Christmas Stories – Trevor Denise

A Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels – IVP

The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church – Cross and Livingstone

Written by Reverend Charmaine Sabey-Corkindale

LUKE 1 : 26 - 56

The Birth of Jesus Foretold

26 In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee,

27 to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

28 The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you."

29 Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.

30 But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God.

31 You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus.

32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David,

33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."

34 "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

35 The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.

36 Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month.

37 For nothing is impossible with God."

38 "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

Mary Visits Elizabeth

39 At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea,

40 where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth.

41 When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

42 In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!

43 But why am I so favoured, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

44 As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.

45 Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!"

Mary's Song

46 And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord

47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,

48 for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed,

49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me— holy is his name.

50 His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.

51 He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.

53 He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.

54 He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful

55 to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers."

56 Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.