

Long ago and far away, there was a young girl named Mary. Something absolutely astounding had happened to her—she had become pregnant. And not in the usual human way. She had been “overshadowed by the power of the Holy Spirit. As the famous ex-slave, Sojourner Truth put it: “Where did your Christ come from? Where did your Christ come from? From God and a woman! Man had nothing to do with it!”

Not only that, but an angel, Gabriel, had visited her beforehand, to tell her it would happen. It was so strange, but Mary had faith that God was working for the best. We must, too, in birth, even unusual birth, and in loss and death and everything. We need to have the faith that God is doing the very best thing.

Anyway, you can imagine how this news might go down with her family, and her fiancé Joseph. Not to mention what the village might do if they found out—they weren’t going to believe such a story!

So, maybe the best thing to do was have Mary leave town for a while. That’s it, go visit your cousin Elizabeth.

They say Elizabeth is expecting, too! Also in strange circumstances. She and her husband Zechariah are way too old to be having a baby, the first one, no less. And he has even lost his voice. Maybe she’s just imagining it and putting on weight? No, she really is going to have a baby!

Off Mary goes to visit. Well, these miraculous babies, as yet unborn, knew each other. As Mary greeted Elizabeth, Elizabeth’s unborn baby John jumped, for the first time.

Some of us know how that feels that first time—surprising, wonderful, and scary.

Elizabeth took it further, my baby has recognized that you, Mary, are the mother of the Lord, the Messiah, God’s Son come to save us, just as God has always promised.

With that, Mary burst into song, the song known as the Magnificat:

My soul doth magnify the Lord.

My spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

He has regarded me.

His servant I will be, from this day evermore.

My soul doth magnify the Lord.

Mary knew that with the birth of God’s own Son, things were going to change. Everything was going to turn upside-down and inside out. The years and years of suffering of God’s Chosen People would end.

It would be just as the Old Testament prophets had said. And that is what happened. Even the detail of the place of birth was right. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, just as Micah had said.

“In this birth, God is intent on changing the priorities of the world. God looks with favor upon the lowly.

God scatters the proud in the imagination of their hearts. God brings the powerful down from their thrones.

God sends the rich away, empty.” (F. Richard Garland)

Think about that first part—In the birth of Jesus, God is intent on changing the priorities of the world.

That's great! We could use some help with that!

This world of ours! If someone from another planet were to visit and make a report on the priorities here—what would that report say? Money, youth, beauty, possessions, power! Such a being might get the impression that the seven deadly sins of lust, envy, pride, anger, gluttony, sloth, and greed were goals, instead of things to avoid!

Thanks be to God for sending Jesus to this world of ours! We are so blessed to have our Savior, the center of our faith, who taught us God's priorities: faith, kindness, honesty, justice, mercy, love, help to those in need, family.

According to Jo-Ann Jennings, in Volume 9 of the Storyteller's Companion to the Bible,

[The song Mary sings] is a promise that God will judge the arrogant and powerful and will give attention to the needs of the lowly, the hungry, and the poor. Here the audience is served notice about the nature of the kingship of Jesus and its claims on them as his subjects."

And yet, we need to ask ourselves, where do we fit into this picture?

"Where do our lives encounter this prophetic vision?

. . . Are we lowly servants upon whom God looks with favor?

. . . . Does our pride sometimes interfere with what God seeks to accomplish through us?

. . . . Do we sometimes let our need for power and control interfere with God's work?

. Are we sometimes rich in things and poor in soul?

As the time of the Lord's coming draws near, let us test and examine our ways and return to the Lord, so that Love may have a place to dwell." (F. Richard Garland)

How can we be at one with God's purposes, and not the ones God is chastising and removing power and advantages from, in this plan?

There's a challenge for us! Can we claim to be on the side of the angels—or do we really need to examine our lives, and focus on the good we can do, rather than the goods we can receive?

Let's do that. Let's look at the justice and mercy and righteousness to which God has called us, as Christians. Are we there, or have we fallen away from the path, and ended up so overly-focused on ourselves that we "have not heard the cry of the needy?"

As we finish this waiting season, the Advent of 2009, preparing to celebrate the birth of Jesus, let us do the soul-searching and life-changing we need to do, so that we can worship the Christ Child, the one of peace, in all love and truth and purity. Amen.

By Rev. Sally J. DeMasters