

WHEN GOD ENTERS...

This is our last Sunday in Advent, and we have lit the fourth candle, the love candle, also known as the angels' candle. We are coming to the end of our journey in this season. We have traveled with a hope, seeking peace, and finding joy and then we can share love. Isn't that exactly what God did for us so many years ago, and continues to do to this very day? With a hope to reconnect with man and bring peace and joy into our relationship with him, knowing the love of the Father for us.

This morning I want to focus in on the one person God demonstrated all these elements of advent - hope, peace, joy and love to, and the reaction to God.

The special person I want to focus on is the young lady that sang the song of today's gospel reading, known as the Magnificat – Mary.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, feels like a family member for all we recall of her in the scriptures. However, if we look into her life we find some things we don't really know about her. To begin with there is question where she was exactly born. Tradition say Jerusalem, others say Nazareth. We do know she was born somewhere in dry Galilean hills surrounding Nazareth. Life there came with many uncertainties like crop failure due to locust, field mice, and undependable rain. People living in such an area had learned to have **a strong** reliance on the lord. Mary had a life of constant work – grinding grains, food prep, making clothes, feeding livestock, as well as going to the well to draw water.

Mary lived in a land that had, it seemed, endless conquerors or invaders from the Babylonians to the romans. Mary and those who lived such a life had a strong and deep faith in God's promise to one day send his messiah for the people of Israel.

Mary, now around the age of 15, knew the time had come for marriage, arranged by contract with her parents, to a man of their choice. Just imagine parents having a daughter around 15 and preparing her for marriage! Today, for the young the thought would be - "no way". Such was the life of Mary. She was ready to take part in the engagement ceremony, return home to live with her parents for about year, then go to live with Joseph her husband after he had fulfilled the marriage contract.

When God enters...the life of Mary, things are about to change not just in her world, but for the entire world! Mary is visited by the angel and told all the details, and with answers to her questions. Pause for a moment, what would have been your reaction?

Mary lived a life with a deep and strong faith, relying on God, and she was not abandoning it despite the circumstances she found herself in. In fact, look at her answer in verse 38 “behold the servant or bond slave of the lord; be it done to me according to your word” Mary had been taught the scriptures and knew of the messiah. Now it was her obedience and love of God that led her to submit entirely to God’s will.

Last Sunday I spoke of words having special or different meaning for us as disciples. Here is a perfect example. There are two words used in a previous sentence – submit and obedience, two very “rub-in-the-wrong-way” words and ideas. Submit! Obey! Not in my vocabulary!

Mary had faith in and a love of God that allowed her to accept God’s will. Remember she was a young girl in the hills near Nazareth leading an ordinary life, but God saw in her the love and faith needed to carry out God’s plan. God sees in us too that potential, but we have to be willing to step up and step out!!!

God had already entered the lives of Zacharias and Elizabeth by the birth-to-be of John the Baptist. Despite Zacharias being a priest in the temple his unbelief cost him his voice. Meanwhile Elizabeth was shown favor and the disgrace by the people of having no children was erased with her pregnancy. When God enters lives one way or another things do change. Later on when Zacharias regained his voice he delivered a prophecy aware of God’s faithfulness to his people and him.

When God enters...Joseph’s life the direction and plans are dramatically changed. We don’t hear much of Joseph and his faith but I would venture to assume it was deep and strong not unlike Mary’s. Why? Because when the angel came he was obedient and carried out God’s will. Again, God must have seen in Joseph one who would be obedient, he knew the heart of Joseph.

God knows our hearts too, and what we can do when asked. However, hear this – **God does not force himself on us.** Mary, Joseph, Elizabeth, and Zacharias could have all refused to go along with what was asked of them when God entered their lives, but their common thread between them was the faith and love they had for God. If God came to you, would your faith in and love of God prompt you to act? Only God and you know that answer, but it is something to examine in this season of Advent, of being prepared for the days ahead and birth of Jesus Christ and what that birth means in your life!

When God did enter...Mary's life and despite her confusion, troubles, and being overwhelmed, she sought a caring, understanding, and wise person, her cousin, Elizabeth. When God enters...a life He does provide us with wisdom and guidance in human form. We should never fear that we have to go it alone – God and others are there, and we must seek them out.

When God entered...Mary's life she was able by her knowledge of the scripture and her faith in and love of God lift praise to Him from her spirit. Known as Mary's song or more properly the Magnificat --it is a song of faith, hope, and most of all love.

When God entered....Mary's life there was faith. Mary's song is indeed about the faithfulness of God to his people. When we give God the praise and worship it takes the focus off us, and increases our faith in God because of his mercy and grace toward us. It's that focus on God, his word, and his promises that lets us live by faith and not focus on circumstances that could, if we let them, rob us of hope, peace and joy! Stop a moment, here is Mary, pregnant and betrothed, yet she can sing her song!!!

When God enters...in Mary's life there is hope and it is strengthened and encouraged by her faith. She has a hope based on God's promises as found in Genesis 12 and 17 to establish the everlasting covenant, bless all the nations, and be their God. As disciples and believers our hope too is anchored in the promises of God, despite favorable or chaotic times that come and go. After all Jesus told us in Matthew 24 and with his last words that "**his words will never pass away and he is with us always!**"

When God entered...Mary's life there is love overflowing from her spirit in praise to God. Mary knew the Messiah was coming at long last, and she was overjoyed that the time had come for the Messiah. Mary drew on her knowledge of the scripture, using images from Genesis, job, Psalms and Isaiah to express the love and gratitude for promises fulfilled of a Messiah.

When God entered the lives of the Pharisees and Sadducees who knew the scriptures too, but without the love and understanding Mary had, they destroyed the one that was promised to come.

This Advent season will we take the time to express the love and joy to God for his gift of His Son? We all have the time to express it, to stop and give God what he deserves because we certainly didn't deserve that which he gave us!!! But because "God so loved the world" we can look to the birth of Jesus Christ.

When God entered...Mary's life there was a song of hope, faith, and love as she was chosen by God. God has chosen us too for a purpose. The word of God is meant to be expressed through us to others. God dwells by the Holy Spirit within, Jesus abides with us and these words of promise are true today as they were in the Old Testament, during Jesus' time and in the future!!!! It is the faith and hope of a disciple – us.

Advent, God with us, coming to the least likely people, in the least likely places – our homes, our work, our schools, and every place we live and move. Just as with Mary, God does not force himself on any one. He takes the initiative and makes the invitation. Will we answer as Mary did by saying "I am the Lord's Servant. May it be to me as You have said"?

We have lit the candles of hope, peace, joy and now love. Mary displayed all these qualities in her "song". She loved God, His word, had hope in His promises, peace and joy in knowing about her part in the birth of Jesus Christ. Advent is the season of preparation. May we all know the true meaning of "the words of Advent" and through our love share, hope, peace and joy. Amen.