

Isaiah 35:1-10
December 12, 2010

Luke 1:47-55
St. James U.C.C.

GET READY!

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Our scriptures tell us of so much! Isaiah prophesies a healing end to exile. Mary's song celebrates that the hungry will be fed. How will we sing these songs and tell these stories in our own land?

In Isaiah the prophet summarizes the prophecies of the first part of this chapter by painting a vivid word picture of the time when God will bring peace, safety, and abundance to God's people.

The tiny kingdom of Judah (the southern part of what was once the kingdom of Israel under David) inhabited a narrow strip of fertile land sandwiched between the Mediterranean Sea and the deserts of the Arabian Peninsula. For a people with their back to a desert, Isaiah's pictures of utopia includes bubbling water, flowing stream, and fertility. The people of Judah are, however, threatened by more than the encroaching desert. They have been at the mercy of the Assyrian and Babylonian empires.

In Isaiah's vision, the desert is not longer a place of threat but is transformed into a lush and fertile place. It is not only the land that will be changed, but also the people. Those who are literally and metaphorically deaf, blind, dumb, and lame will be restored to wholeness.

To all who are fearful, Isaiah proclaims hope. The trade routes that pass through Judah will no longer be dangerous but will be paths of peace and safety. Along these paths, God's chosen people will return to their land.

God will fulfill His promises and bring about a transformation and restoration that will exceed the damages incurred during the exile. Isaiah holds forth the hope of God's transformation of the entire world.

Words of hope and joy arise in Mary in our gospel lesson from Luke. This message has become one of the great hymns of the church, the Magnificat. Magnificat which means glorifies and this song is like a psalm. In response to the news that she is about to be the mother of God's chosen one, Mary, a young Jewish woman answers "I am the Lord's servant, may it be to me as you have said."

Although Luke attributed this song to Mary many think it was originally spoken to Elizabeth but for Luke it belongs to Mary. She was the model of faith who believed what was spoken to her was from the Lord; she is the one who fulfills Jewish expectation. The poem has two parts. The first expresses Mary's personal thanksgiving. She was a lowly handmaiden who will be called blessed by all generations. God will work through her for the salvation of many.

Mary tells of her gratitude, "My soul magnifies the Lord." My soul adores, praises and honors God. What a contrast between Mary's attitude and that of so many people over the centuries, including ourselves. Let us examine ourselves on how seldom we praise God. Yet our faith tells us that prayers of praise and adoration are the most important form of prayer. Unless we praise God, magnifying Him, we are not acknowledging God for who He is and ourselves for what we are. God longs for us to tell Him, "How great Thou art." Mary not only says "My soul magnifies the Lord but she adds, "and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." Joy follows on praising God.

God wants us to be happy and to rejoice in Him. Mary had a clear idea of who she was, that she was the Mother of the Messiah and Mary knew she was blessed. The only reason why Mary became, under God, the Mother of God is because she was aware of being the servant of the Lord.

The second half of the song is Mary's praise of God. According to Mary, God is power, holiness and mercy. He is power because He can do whatever He wills. He is holiness because He is wholly other. What do we mean by "growing in holiness? We mean that we are to grow more and more like God. How is God mercy? God is merciful for He loves the sinner even as He hates the sin. His mercy is boundless and His kindness towards the weak and fallen is proverbial. God wants us to be more humble, more patient, and more prayerful.

Next Mary compares the lot of the humble and the proud. Compare these statements: "He has scattered the proud, He has put down the mighty, He has sent the rich away empty, He has exalted the lowly, and He has filled the hungry with good things. It is not so much Mary telling us these things, but Jesus in her womb speaking through His mother's lips.

Lastly, Mary tells us that God keeps His promises. What a faith Mary had and incredible trust. If I were in her shoes and in a sense I am and so are you, I'm not sure how I would react. Not Mary although she asks the question, "How can this be?" she accepted the answer and that yes, God is with her; and he would bless and through her she would bless others. Mary lacked all the credentials that most humans think important for anyone making such a dramatic change in history. Indeed almost everything is against her: age, inexperience, gender, marital status. But what Mary has in her favor is the grace, favor and love of God.

Our God who has created heaven and earth, the animals and birds, the trees and flowers, the seas and all that is in them, our God can do anything. Answering yes to God's call may not be easy, there are so many things to ponder, yet Mary took that leap of faith to go ahead even though all the answers and all the questions were not clear. When we become God's willing servant we become part of a larger hope for all God's people: that hope we heard about in Mary's song. We have been chosen! Just think about it, we are each one of us so special in His eyes. And thanks be to God, it doesn't matter where

you are now in your faith journey God is not bound by our limitations. With God nothing is impossible, and God is with us, He will not abandon us. Our God is a faithful God.

PRAYER

Loving God, as we approach the day of Christ's birth help us to throw wide the door of our heart in preparation. Help us to answer yes to your call even though all the questions are far from clear. Amen