

ST. JOHN'S AT DIOCESAN CENTER IGLESIA EPISCOPAL DE SAN JUAN

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CHILDREN OF DESTINY

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Text of a Sermon preached the Fourth Sunday of Advent

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MICAH 5:2-5A | SONG OF MARY
HEBREWS 10:5-10 | LUKE 1:39-46

Mary was 14, maybe 15 years old. Elizabeth 50, passed child bearing years. One the daughter of Judah, the other the daughter of Levi, they were cousins, kinsmen, according to tribe. But it is what God did for each of them that invited them to be family, truly made them friends.

Mary, shocked not only by her pregnancy, but perhaps by her inexplicable faith and trust in the message of an angel, cannot possibly know what is happening within her. With whom can she share this secret? Who can possibly help her come to terms with it and bring it to term? Mary runs to Elizabeth's house and says this is where I need to be. Do you mind if I stay a while?

I suppose this is where all earth shattering events begin, not just in the womb, but in the hidden shelter of where we were brought up. In the quiet afternoons, the son of Caesar dreams of winning the next great battle, of extending the empire. And while parents may or may not have dreams for their children, each child, however seemingly insignificant, has a destiny. Sometimes, because of poverty, prejudice, and custom, the world tries to deny this truth: Each child born into this world is a child of destiny.

The moment of conception is the beginning of all faith. The woman who is unable to conceive must have faith, that even if she die childless, she as a purpose, if not to care for others, to find her place in the destiny of others. Faith demands it. Even men must learn to hear these words as a possible impossibility: you are with child. It is what makes us human and brings us into the presence and purpose of God.

And should the woman who did not think she could have children, find herself with child, it is as if we are given the gift of private conversation with God. Angels confirm that though we be faithless, God will keep his promises.

And if a mere child finds herself inexplicably pregnant, with child of the Holy Spirit, well then, she will learn if her tribe, her kinsmen, her family will accept her, but not just her, but accept the destiny of this particular child. Not every young girl who becomes a mother is so fortunate as Mary. In Mary's case there was one woman who understood. One woman who could read the prophets, who never lost faith in her purpose for others in her life, who while taking care of so many others, suddenly found herself with child. And so she could help young Mary understand what was happening to her. To trust and believe in the special calling of her child.

When Mary greets Elizabeth, and the not yet born John the Baptist leaps in Elizabeth's womb, and the heartbeat of Mary's child cannot yet be heard, nor can she yet feel the sense of a person within, we are in the territory of pure potentiality, pure destiny. The question, 'how can this be', has grown. If this is really happening, 'what will this be'. What difference will this life coming into the world really make. Every child is a child of destiny.

This two children, John and Jesus, will grow up at the intersection of the human and the divine. We do not have words for this sudden marriage of the human and the divine. The Angel tells us: 'the Almighty will overshadow you.' St. John will say that the Word became Flesh and will make his home with us. But perhaps the most wonderful way to think of it is the phrase John uses: a light has shone in the darkness. A spark catches fire. A new energy comes into the world. There is suddenly a very distinct light in each woman's dark womb.

Words fail us. Elizabeth, full of the Holy Spirit, says, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

And Mary, full of the Spirit, but full of much more, can only sing a song of praise in return, a song that recalls Hanna's song she sang to the Lord when she presented her three year old child Samuel to the Lord in the temple, dedication him to be the one to find the first true king of Israel.

In short, John will conclude the work of the prophets of the First Covenant, by preparing the way for the last King of Israel, the Messiah. Jesus, by his death and resurrection, will anoint us the prophets and witnesses to his salvation, by incorporating us into his divine light and life, by calling us his brothers and sisters, and as King of Kings, having the power to present us as sons and daughters to Creator of All.

Every child not only has a destiny, but is a destiny. This child Jesus will change everything, upend everything. Powers will be upended. The poor will be satisfied. The rich will not be punished, but will be sent away empty until they return realizing they need him.

Most importantly, no single shred of pride will stand, no arrogance or violence will win the day. What Jesus will prove is that even in the face of suffering and death and every human evil, God is in charge, and the light will transform everything.

God will keep his promise to save us. Mary rejoices as she is able to tell Elizabeth about this revolution going on inside her. Future generations will call her Theotokos, the God Bearer. Her destiny is to bring this destiny to term, to present him to the world.

And the only note we might miss, the only gift we might overlook in this last stage of preparing for the coming of God to us, is to not realize that we too are being called to do the same, that is, to be bearers of this divine light.

In these next few moments, receive God's word. Mary has come to your house, and you greet her, and the deepest place within you leaps for joy. You see it, perhaps clearly for the first time, a light, lit from within, a gift, pure gift, and this light's destiny is to fill you, to change you, to make all you do and all your relationships, participants, partakers of the light.

And you sing out: My soul magnifies the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my savior!"