

Speaking of Jesus: Advent Reflections on Hope
St. David's By the Sea, Cocoa Beach, FL
Session 2: Two Songs
December 13, 2011

Fruit of Gabriel's "Next Steps"

- Mary, filled with the Spirit hastens to the hill country.
 - Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit
 - "Blessed" "the distinctive joy which comes through participation in the divine kingdom."
 - Baby John leaps for joy (Lk 1:15b)
 - "Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to hear from the Lord."
 - Conception by hearing
 - Luke 8:15
 - Mary's Fiat: Posture of living desire "It is so, may it be so."
 - Passion, strength, vision
- Mary responds by singing "Hannah's song" (with improvisations) back to Elizabeth.
 - "My heart exults in the Lord, my strength is exalted in the Lord." (I Sam 2:1)
 - True community established between Mary and Elizabeth
 - "Our community with one another consists solely in what Christ has done to both of us. This is true not merely at the beginning, as though in the course of time something else were to be added to our community; it remains so for all the future and to all eternity. I have community with others and I shall continue to have it only through Jesus Christ."
(Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 26)

Mary's Song: The Magnificat (Anglican Evening Prayer)

- "The Great Reversal"
 - Humility
 - Mercy
 - Center: "He has shown strength with his arm; and scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts."

- Luther on the Magnificat
 - "This little maid has seen more accurately into the scriptures than all the Jews, and she had connected with all the prophecies and examples which are to be found anywhere in Scripture." Her well-digested song contains the heart of the Christian faith. As Luther continues, "The dear Virgin is occupied with no insignificant thoughts; they come from the first commandment, "You should fear and love God," and she sums up the way God rules in one short text, a joyful song for all the lowly. She is a good painter and singer; she sketches God well and sings of him better than anyone, for she names the God who helps the lowly and crushes all that is great and proud. This song lacks nothing; it is well sung, and needs only people who can say 'yes' to it and wait. But such people are few." [David S. Yeago, "The Presence of Mary in the Mystery of the Church" in *Mary: Mother of God* ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, 77)

Zechariah's Song "Benedictus" (Anglican Morning Prayer)

- Gabriel's "gift" of silence
 - Diadochus of Photiki offers us a very concrete image: 'When the door of the steambath is continually left open, the heat inside rapidly escapes through it; likewise the soul, in its desire to say many things, dissipates its remembrance of God through the door of speech, even though everything it says may be good. Thereafter the intellect, though lacking appropriate ideas, pours out a welter of confused thoughts to anyone it meets, as it no longer has the Holy Spirit to keep its understanding free from fantasy. Ideas of value always shun verbosity, being foreign to confusion and

fantasy. Timely silence, then, is precious, for it nothing less than the mother of the wisest thoughts.” (Nouwen, *With Burning Heart*, “Silence”)

- “Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son” → “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel”
 - Moves from non-receptive posture that is “down and in” to receptive posture of “up and out”

Themes of Zechariah’s Song

- Praise
 - To the Lord God of Israel (vs. 68-75)
 - Common Jewish prayer when God has given his people decisive victory over the power of evil.
 - God never forgets his people
 - Fulfillment of Promise to Abraham for a “worship-filled peace”
- Prophecy
 - Who is John to be? (Isaiah 40)
 - Prepare the way of the Lord—
repentance/forgiveness of sins
- Praise for God’s mercy
 - Because of the mercy of God (vs. 78-79)
 - The sunrise shall visit us
 - (the plant shall sprout, the star shall rise)

Two Songs: Incredible hope for God’s people in this birth that is filled with the reality of God’s unmovable mercy.