

Blessed is She who Believed.

*A meditation given at Christ Church, Sheridan, by the Rev. Bruce McNab, at the Service of Advent Lessons and Carols.
4th Sunday of Advent, Yr. C. December 23, 2012. (Text: Luke 1:39-55)*

Hardly anybody could have been more fatalistic about life than a Galilean peasant girl in Bible times. Peasants were always on the bottom of the social pyramid, and among them their young women ranked lowest. Nobody had fewer rights or privileges. Girls were valuable only to the extent that they could work in the fields, card and spin wool, weave cloth, prepare food, and bear children. A young woman had no career opportunities, and no choices about her life. She was married off at about fourteen to a man her father had chosen, and that was that. A Galilean peasant girl was the social opposite of her counterpart in America today.

Jesus our Savior was born to precisely such a poor peasant girl, a humble young woman *who believed the promises of God...* and thus was blessed.

Gabriel the Archangel came to Mary in the tiny village of Nazareth and announced that God's own life would be born from *her!* There was just one condition: that she say "yes," believe the angel's message from God, and wait for it to come to pass. She was being offered a *choice*—maybe for the first time in her life!

Here's how this event in the life of a poor Jewish country girl connects with *us*. Here's where Mary becomes an example for us. To us, as to her—each of us in our own kind of poverty, in our own kind of helplessness in the face of circumstances, in our own kind of humility and weakness—there comes *a promise from God* . . . The promise of a Savior who will be "born in us" if we will choose to say "yes" to God, trust his Word, and wait for that Word to be fulfilled.

There are three things we can learn from the story of the Mary.

The first thing is that God respects our freedom and never *forces* his will upon us. God offers himself, and we can say "yes" or "no" to what He proposes. When Gabriel gave God's message to Mary, she answered, "*I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be with me as you have said.*" Mary said "Yes." She made her life available to God. Unlike Moses or Jeremiah this little girl did not say, "Oh, can't you find someone else?" She simply said, "Your will be done," just as her Son would say one night in the Garden of Gethsemane.

The second thing is that we will be blessed if we *believe* God's promises and have patience until they are fulfilled. *Faith*, trust in God's word, has to be the foundation of our relationship with God. Elizabeth said, "*Blessed is she who BELIEVED that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.*" You and I move FROM faith TO understanding. It doesn't work the other way 'round. We don't *start* by figuring God out for ourselves, getting it straight in our heads, and *then* decide to believe. No, we *start* by trusting what God has revealed to us, and then—if we're patient—one day we'll understand. The Christian life isn't about mastering information; it's about *trusting* God.

The third and final thing to notice is that *JOY* is God's gift to everyone who trusts him and waits for the fulfillment of his promises. Joy is what people who've been lost in the mountains feel when they see the sheriff's department helicopter circling overhead. Faithful hearts treat God's promises of the future as if the future were already here. We "*walk by faith, not by sight.*"

Christmas reminds us, year after year, that God always does the unexpected. Always. He reverses the world's patterns of power. He does the *unexpected*. As Mary said in her song, "*He has cast down the mighty from their thrones and has lifted up the lowly.*" If we trust God's promise that His Son will come to us, then we—like Mary—will surely have our own time of gladness.

Today, we say "Yes" to God. "*Let it be with us as you have said.*"