

King of Glory Lutheran Church – December 23-24, 2017

Advent 4: Luke 1: 26-38 “Mother Mary”

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Mary was chosen by God to bear the Christ. God chooses all of us to bear Christ as well.

With Christmas Eve tomorrow (tonight) it's hard to keep our heads in this 4th Sunday of Advent. But I'm so thankful we are here, because right now we get to hear the story of Mary, the mother of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For 98% of the year, our focus is on Jesus. Jesus. Jesus! Jesus! We discuss His birth, His life, His death, His resurrection, His stories and parables and how He talked and walked and probably what He ate for breakfast as well. Gee whiz, golly molly – you'd think He was the Savior or something!

Not tonight (this morning). This is Mary's moment to shine and she deserves some credit. Not just some credit. Mary deserves a whole bunch of credit for saying yes to God's request that she carry the Son of God in her womb. She is Mother Mary after all. We know our Catholic brothers and sisters venerate Mother Mary, but they aren't the only ones.

Martin Luther loved Mary. He was a huge fan of Mary. It wasn't Mary's goodness or innocence or beauty that Luther focused on. Rather, it was the plain and simple fact that God chose Mary to bear the Christ child.

Rev. Dr. David Lose says this. “To Luther, Mary represented the typical pattern of God's interaction with humans. Indeed, not just interaction, but election. That is, it wasn't Mary's goodness or innocence or beauty or even her willingness to serve God that Luther focused on. Rather, it was the plain and simple fact that God *chose* Mary to bear the Christ child. And that fact, to Luther, is not simply plain and simple but also surprising, perhaps even shocking. God didn't choose a royal princess or holy priestess, but a plain and, at least to the world's eyes, utterly insignificant young girl. God chose her. God elected her. God addressed her and honored her and elevated her.”

(<http://www.davidlose.net/2017/12/adv-4-xmas-eve-gods-surprising-choices/>)

In my research for this sermon, I came upon a picture of Mary that I'd never seen before. *The Annunciation* painted by Henry Ossawa Tanner in 1898, pictures a young girl getting ready for bed. (<http://2lessays.blogspot.com/2014/12/meditation-on-henry-ossawa-tanners.html>) She isn't stunningly beautiful, yet in the glow of the angel's presence, Mary is radiant. Her toes peek out from under the long flowing gown reminding us of her humanity.

The tilt of her head and the look on her face make us think she could ask a question, throw out a witty remark, or slip back into prayer immediately. Her hands are clasped. Had she been praying? Did she grab her hands instinctively as if to protect herself from this mysterious creature or restrain herself from crying out?

The more typical paintings of Mary are of an older woman. She has lines in her face or the glow of being out of this world. But this representation is of a teenage girl – which Mary was. She at once looks strong, intelligent and yet beautiful simultaneously. God had chosen her. God had already made up God's mind about the woman who was to bear the Christ child. Now she just needed to say yes.

And say yes she did! “Let it be with me according to your word.”

That answer brought Mary acclaim for centuries to come. Her song, the magnificat has been written down and sung by millions. “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my savior. He has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me and holy is his name!” (Luke 1:46-49)

God elected Mary. Twice the angel says to her, “You have found favor with God.” What is this favor? It’s nothing that Mary has done or hasn’t done. God has simply chosen her. God has raised her up above all other women to be the mother of God. It was a status for only one woman.

God elected Mary. Then Mary allowed God. Mary said yes. And in saying yes, Mary permitted herself to be changed forever. She consented to God inhabiting her very body and spirit. We have no idea what was happening in her spirit during this angelic conversation.

The text says Mary is perplexed. Confused. Puzzled or baffled. Then she asks a very logical question. “How can I have a son when I’m not married yet?” She might have said it with fear, or nervous laughter, or sarcasm or disbelief or any number of emotions.

But then she says yes. “Let it be with me according to your word.”

Perhaps she, more than any other human understood or at least could imagine the life her son, God’s son, was going to live.

David Lose says, “She didn’t expect this. No one did. That’s why Luther loved Mary. She represents all of us. All of us who have no right to expect God’s attention or favor and yet we are surprised to discover that God has chosen, elected, called, addressed, and honored each of us.”
(<http://www.davidlose.net/2017/12/adv-4-xmas-eve-gods-surprising-choices/>)

Aren’t we though? Aren’t we also surprised when God comes to us and calls us out? Not in a negative, consequential way, but rather, that God... notices us? That there are those moments when we feel God’s ‘favor?’

We feel God’s presence in the tender kiss of a loved one. We sense we are doing God’s will as we receive joy in our work or our callings. We listen for that still small voice of God as we pray and God answers! We receive Jesus’ very body and blood into our hands each week. God addresses us in that meal of forgiveness. How is it that the God of the universe might notice us? How is it that God might pause and draw near to us? Might answer our prayers?

Could it be that each one of us has been elected by God for a particular purpose and calling? Now none of us is allowed to be the mother of God. That title and job has already been taken. Yet, we all can bear Christ. This is what I mean.

Another name for Mary is *theotokos*. Theo means God and tokos is bearer. Mary is the God bearer.

God chooses each one of us to be Mother Mary. To bear God's love to those around us each and every day! We all can be a theotokos.

Amy Wright is a theotokos. She is the 2017 Hero of the Year by a national news agency. Two of her children were born with Down's Syndrome. She says, "When you become a parent of a child with special needs, you are instantly thrust into becoming an advocate. Trying to make people see the beauty in their lives that we see."

As she began to advocate for disabled people, Wright decided to open a coffee shop. She named it after her two children, Bitty and Beau. Yet what is different about this coffee shop, is that Amy employs other disabled people. 40 employees to be exact.

What changes as people get their coffee each morning, is the way they view fellow human beings. Often people with physical and intellectual disabilities can be judged by their appearance alone. When Wright and her husband learned that 70% of the disabled are unemployed, they decided to become a part of the solution -- for their children and others. (<http://www.cnn.com/2017/12/17/world/amy-wright-2017-cnn-hero-of-the-year/index.html>)

Amy Wright is a Mother Mary. Whether she knows it or not, she is a God bearer to those who might be otherwise discarded with a glance or an instant judgment. And I believe, that God moved Amy and her husband into this work, so that God's glory might be shown.

You see, it doesn't take an angelic appearance to be Mother Mary. It does take agreeing the Almighty to use us for God's purposes, in the story of God's history, the way God wants to write it.

Oh, Mother Mary. You do deserve your day. Thank you for demonstrating to us your trust in God, your willingness to open your very body to Jesus and your joy in serving. May our lives mirror yours as God finds favor in us as well.

Amen.