

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA

The Third Sunday of Advent: December 11, 2022

“Mary Was Chosen”

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Good morning and welcome to Christ the Lord Church on this third Sunday of Advent, known as Rose Sunday, the day we light the rose-colored candle, and of course, honor Mary, the mother of Jesus.

I want to begin by saying that a similar scene of an immigrant family, an unexpected pregnancy, political angst in the country where you reside, and a fear that the child you bring into the world will be sold, bartered or killed, - oh right we are talking about the Mary story, or are we? This is a story that continues in some version every day, somewhere in the world.

Our Gospel today has some very mystical and magical themes presented to us, but technically it is saying that nothing is impossible through a God that could create a black hole in the universe and then bring to life a platypus. This means that every child is a child of God, and every struggling family deserves to be understood as worthy.

But today is Mary’s day of recognition as she declares the mighty grace of the Lord for choosing her to carry out his plan of salvation, and this will be the focus of my thoughts today.

“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord.” This is said by a young girl in a precarious situation, one that could have her stoned to death, which would have been legal – even as it still is in some countries. But she says an anxious “Yes” to God, and therefore becomes chosen.

What exactly does being chosen by God mean? Some would look at the prosperity type of Bible preaching and say that Mary was chosen and is therefore now forever in God’s grace. You do good, you get good. But, that is not exactly what the nativity story and what lead up to it tells us. In fact ,as usual, God, as eventually Jesus does, turns things upside down.

Mary, chosen by God, now has her very life in danger. So God comes and reassures Joseph. But I can imagine that discussion was not an easy one. And let’s get rid of the Christmas card image of a beautiful donkey scene. Anyone who has ever separated their legs wide enough to have an animal between them, (and we aren’t even talking being pregnant) will know that the position is uncomfortable, the animal odorous, the road dusty, and water scarce. We won’t go into the social and familial issues that may have been hurled in Mary’s direction. But Mary was chosen, and she said yes.

Imagine giving birth to your child in a strange town, fleeing for the safety of your family, then returning to your home town years later to discover the oppressive Roman occupation. Again, remove the TV series versions, and let’s look at Jesus. We know he was not always well-behaved: having run off to the Temple and not joined the family during a holiday. Jesus may not have been the perfect son, how do you raise and train the son of God? But Mary was chosen, and she said yes.

Mary lost her husband by the time Jesus was grown, or at least that seems to be the thought. So as a widow, she became dependent on her children, and one of them was wandering around telling the local religious rulers they had things wrong. She was probably in political peril during most of Jesus' ministry. And let us also add that there is no speaking of Jesus' family being well off or selling land, cattle or such. We get the impression of a surviving family relying on trades work, carpentry. But Mary was chosen, and she said yes.

As an adult woman, just getting ready to relax into the role of grandparent, she watches her son die on a cross for religious and political reasons. Again, remove the Easter card scenes and think of the smell of Jesus' blood, the crowds, the taunting and then the remembrance of that first Christmas morn or back to the day Mary was chosen and she said yes.

Being chosen by God and saying yes is definitely not a promise that the world will be at your feet, or that you get a free pass on life. Being chosen by God and saying yes means loving life for its very self, not what you do or what you can get out of it. It means knowing you are a loved child of God, even in the darkest moments when you feel God has abandoned you. Remembering you are chosen, and continuing to say yes.

But the story doesn't end at the tomb, as we all know. This leaves the question, did Mary really know what she had agreed to? Well, of course not, none of us do. God puts opportunities in front of us and we choose to say yes, and

sometimes it turns out the way we expect and sometimes it doesn't. And that's why knowing Mary's story is important.

This year, as you know, I had the opportunity to visit Fatima in Portugal, the place where three young children saw a vision of Mother Mary by a tree. I have to admit, the place itself seems to be a vortex of positive energy, with a beam of light from the sun hitting that spot, no matter what the rest of the weather pattern was doing.

From Lourdes, to Guadalupe, Mary seems to have become the mother of us all, and so appropriately. She is often represented with a crown and legions of angelic help - all of the glory she did not experience on earth. And she comes not to the presidents, dictators or rulers, but instead to lowly children, or peasants experiencing crisis.

When I was in Fatima I had the thought that maybe there would be a sighting of Mother Mary by some children in the Ukraine. Mary comes to bring light into the darkest of situations. She was chosen and she said yes to being the Mother of God, and therefore also ours.

This holiday season, as the days grow the darkest, Mary has said yes to bringing in the greatest light of our salvation. Even if you are struggling, Mary understands. Choosing God, and saying yes to following Jesus is not always an easy road, but it is the road to life. Amen