

“Mary Gets It”
Sermon by Lisa Crismore
John Knox Presbyterian Church – December 18, 2011

Luke 1:39-56

Knock, knock, knock, knock – Someone is at the door! A visitor has come. Could it be the postman? Or maybe, it is the FedEx courier delivering my sister in-law’s Christmas present from Amazon.com? Perhaps, it is a friend that you have not seen in a long time.

When I was 10 years old, the visitor, who knocked on our door, was a social worker. She brought a 3-month old baby boy, named Jon to our home. My mom and dad had been foster parents for a while. They mostly took care of newborns. It was fun having these new infants in our home but they wouldn’t stay long. These babies were usually adopted by barren couples eager to have children to love. So they would leave rather soon after they arrived on our doorstep. But Jon was different. Little did I know that this little guy, who was only 3 months old at the time, would 5 years later become my brother! Over that time, Jon’s biological mother died and his father was left with 5 children. Jon was the youngest and had only known our family. He was the only one given up for adoption. Our family was so happy to be able to make Jon a permanent member of our family. But who knew the day the visitor brought Jon into our home that our life would be changed forever!

Today, Mary of Nazareth, is the one knocking on Elizabeth’s door. She has gone to see her relative, Elizabeth, who is having a baby! She had been barren for years. So late in life, Elizabeth finds herself pregnant. A gift from God was the message her husband, Zechariah, received in the temple. Such a surprising message, this made Zechariah speechless. He could not talk until the baby was born. This gift would be a special baby, named John.

Now, we all know that John, John the Baptist, grows up to be quite a character, eating locust and honey, living out in the wilderness. But John does pretty incredible things even before he is born. John begins his work early in the womb prophesying who Jesus is. Elizabeth shares with Mary that her child has leaped inside of her as she hears Mary’s voice. The Holy Spirit blesses Elizabeth with the knowledge that Mary is with child. This child will be very special. This child will be her Lord!

How affirming for Mary! Mary has been told this by the angel. But now she hears it again by Elizabeth. She is the one to have God’s child. She believes it is true. Early in scripture we read that Mary only questions God in the beginning. Then she is ready to accept God’s will for her life and be an obedient servant. But she must still wonder how can this be? She is a virgin. She is not married. She is young and poor. Why has God seen favor in her?

She has heard the scriptures from Isaiah. She knows that God has promised to send a Messiah. It has been thousands of years. It was God’s covenant with the people of Israel. For many years the people have held onto to what the prophets had said, waiting and waiting and waiting for it to occur.

I remember taking a class at Pittsburgh Seminary and the professor talking about the difficult position the prophets were put in as they foretold the future. It could be years, even life times, before what they had prophesied would finally come into being. But now, in just 6-9 months, the waiting will finally be over. It will come to pass! Jesus Christ will be born and it will be a new beginning!

But how can this be? Why was Mary chosen by God? She knows nothing about being a mother. She had not asked for a child. It is not like Elizabeth or her distant relative Hannah, who she remembers the stories told about her. Hannah had also wanted a child for so long.

Hannah had wanted a child really bad so much so that she would weep daily. She had gone to the temple to pray to God for a child. Hannah was so distraught over being barren and pleading with God that the priest, Eli, thought she was drunk. Eli asks, "What is the problem?" She explains to him how much she wants a baby. She also promises that if God blesses her with a child, this child will be a servant of the Lord. Hannah returns home and soon becomes pregnant. Oh what joy Hannah must have felt to receive this news. Hannah is blessed by God and gives birth to a beautiful baby boy. He is given the name Samuel. But once the baby is weaned, we read in 1 Samuel 1:22 she makes good on her promise as Hannah brings him to the temple. She hands him over to the priest Eli so that he can be in the presence of the Lord and serve him forever! Hannah really doesn't get to cherish her baby for long! She receives the gift and then gives it back to God.

Mary gets it! For some reason, God has chosen her to carry this gift for all the people. She knows how difficult it will be to face her parents, Joseph and the scrutiny of the village. But she has been blessed and so like Hannah she sings!

Mary's song is referred to by many as "The Magnificat" taken from verse 47, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." I wanted to share with you Mary song from [The Message](#), which is a contemporary paraphrased Bible written by Eugene Peterson.

*I'm bursting with God-news;
I'm dancing the song of my Savior God.
God took one good look at me, and look what happened—
I'm the most fortunate woman on earth!
What God has done for me will never be forgotten,
the God whose very name is holy, set apart from all others.
His mercy flows in wave after wave
on those who are in awe before him.
He bared his arm and showed his strength,
scattered the bluffing braggarts.
He knocked tyrants off their high horses,
pulled victims out of the mud.
The starving poor sat down to a banquet;
the callous rich were left out in the cold.
He embraced his chosen child, Israel;
he remembered and piled on the mercies, piled them high.
It's exactly what he promised,
beginning with Abraham and right up to now.*

Mary sings as a girl who has been blessed by God. She also sings of the challenges that the people of God have faced for many years. She knows of the oppression the Israelites faced in the exile. She has experienced first-hand the oppression her family and neighbors have endured from the Roman government. The brutality of Herod's soldiers is real when they come to collect the taxes. Mary sings that this child she is carrying will take all this away. Mary speaks of the hope and mercy that this child will bring for all of God's people "from the beginning of Abraham and right up to now". Mary knows that

this baby will be a sacrifice for her. She is willing to accept the consequences because she believes this baby will change the world.

As this last week of Advent approaches, we make our way to Bethlehem, following the star and searching for the Christ child. How will we receive him? Will we be ready to make a sacrifice like Mary? Will we be ready to sing our own song of praise and honor for the newborn king in our lives?

When my brother Jon came into my parent's lives, life never was the same. He was a pleasant child although hyperactive. He was a loving adult. Over the years, it was found that my brother had fetal alcohol syndrome. He struggled throughout his entire life, trying to stay away from drugs and alcohol. It was not easy being the parents of Jon Graves, in fact it was very challenging. But I don't think my folks would have had it any other way. They knew that God chose them for a reason.

Mary's life was changed forever with the news that she is going to have a child. How will our lives be changed? We hear this age old familiar story. How will we receive it new this year? How will our lives be changed? Thanks be to God for choosing a lowly poor maiden to bring our Savior into the world. Amen.