

SCRIPTURE READING FOR DECEMBER 19, 2021 @ CAPC OAKLAND

Luke 1:39-55
COMMON ENGLISH BIBLE

³⁹ Mary got up and hurried to a city in the Judean highlands. ⁴⁰ She entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴² *With a loud voice she blurted out,* "God has blessed you above all women, and he has blessed the child you carry. ⁴³ Why do I have this honor, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ As soon as I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy. ⁴⁵ Happy is she who believed that the Lord would fulfill the promises he made to her."

⁴⁶ Mary said,

"With all my heart I glorify the Lord!

⁴⁷ In the depths of who I am
I rejoice in God my savior.

⁴⁸ He has looked with favor
on the low status of his servant.

Look! From now on,
everyone will consider me highly favored

⁴⁹ because the mighty one
has done great things for me.

Holy is God's name.

⁵⁰ The LORD shows mercy to everyone,
from one generation to the next,
who honors him as God.

⁵¹ [God] has shown strength with his arm.
scattered those with arrogant thoughts
and proud inclinations.

⁵² [The LORD] has pulled the powerful
down from their thrones
and lifted up the lowly.

⁵³ [God] has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away empty-handed.

⁵⁴ [The LORD] has come
to the aid of his servant Israel,
remembering his mercy,

⁵⁵ just as he promised to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to Abraham's descendants
forever."

LANGUAGE NOTES & TEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

The Gospel of Luke is one of the four Biblical tellings of the life, teaching and mission of Jesus of Nazareth. Luke writes with a mastery of Greek that other writers don't share, indicating that he was highly educated and spoke Greek well. He takes pains to explain what Jewish traditions and cultural pieces mean to non Jewish readers.

With a loud voice she blurted out :: In the larger story of the birth of Jesus we've already encountered the two women at the center of today's reading. Elizabeth is married to the priest Zechariah who was silenced, and rendered mute when he didn't believe in what God is doing. (Luke 1:5-25) This older woman, rendered invisible and silent in society because of her advanced age and barrenness. Fertility was idolized as crucial for women and in terms of individual worth. It's striking that we encounter her, speaking first with a loud voice.

Mary's song of gratitude and faith echoes one of another woman – Hannah - in the Hebrew Scriptures who prayed for God's help in her infertility. In particular look at Luke 1:50-53 and 1 Samuel 2:4-8

1 Samuel 2:1-11

¹ Then Hannah prayed:

My heart rejoices in the Lord.
My strength rises up in the Lord!
My mouth mocks my enemies
because I rejoice in your deliverance.

² No one is holy like the Lord—

no, no one except you!
There is no rock like our God!

³ Don't go on and on, talking so proudly,
spouting arrogance from your mouth,
because the Lord is the God who knows,
and he weighs every act.

⁴ The bows of mighty warriors are shattered,
but those who were stumbling
now dress themselves in power!

⁵ Those who were filled full
now sell themselves for bread,
but the ones who were starving
are now fat from food!

The woman who was barren
has birthed seven children,
but the mother with many sons
has lost them all!

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & EXAMEN:

- What engaged you, enraged you, or surprised you in these texts?
- Today's scripture known as the Magnificat or Mary's song. It points to the consistently mysterious way in which God acts in the world differently than we would. Those that are invisible, often not noticed, or appreciated in society (older, infertile women like Elizabeth) are lifted up as leaders and speakers for God – whereas the usual leaders, the ones we assume to “know things” (like the established older male priest Zechariah are unable to understand what God is up to. Where else in scripture do you encounter stories in which God's invisible hand in the world is made visible in ways that challenge and reverse our expectations?
- You might call this song the first Christmas song. What does Mary sing of in her confession of faith? How does it speak to you today?
- What invitation do you hear the Spirit of God speaking to you – or to us, as a church – to act, speak, be or change through this word of scripture?

LANGUAGE NOTES & TEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

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⁶ The Lord! He brings death, gives life,
takes down to the grave, and raises up!

⁷ The Lord! He makes poor, gives wealth,
brings low, but also lifts up high!

⁸ God raises the poor from the dust,
lifts up the needy from the garbage pile.
God sits them with officials,
gives them the seat of honor!

The pillars of the earth belong to the Lord;
he set the world on top of them!

⁹ God guards the feet of his faithful ones,
but the wicked die in darkness
because no one succeeds by strength alone.

¹⁰ The Lord! His enemies are terrified!
God thunders against them from heaven!
The Lord! He judges the far corners of the earth!
May God give strength to his king
and raise high the strength of his anointed one.