

## **Celebrate Advent and Christmas with Bishop Laurie Haller – Week Four: Service**

Grace and peace on this fourth Sunday in the season of Advent. The theme of our devotion today is service. Listen to these words of Mary from the gospel of Luke that are commonly called the Magnificat.

“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
For 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.  
His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.  
He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.  
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly;  
He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.  
He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,  
According to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

Why Mary? Why did God choose Mary to be the one to give birth to Jesus? Mary was a teenager from a small, nondescript town in Israel called Nazareth, from an ordinary family where she probably helped her mother around the house and worked the fields with her father and brothers. She carried jugs of water to her home from the town well and was engaged to a local young man named Joseph.

Mary didn't stand out. She wasn't anything special. And that's precisely why God chose her. One ordinary day Mary was going about her normal chores when, in the blink of an eye, her life changed forever. An angel, Gabriel, appeared to Mary and said, “Hey! What's up, Mary? The Lord is with you.”

Mary had no idea what was going on, but that was to her advantage because she didn't immediately dismiss Gabriel. Because Mary knew that she was a nobody, she was open and curious as well as puzzled. Gabriel said, “Don't worry, Mary, for you have found favor with God. You are going to conceive and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He is going to be called the Son of the Most High and will reign over the house of Jacob forever.”

Mary, God bless her, took it all in stride and asked good questions. “Okay, so how is this going to take place since Joseph and I are not officially married yet?”

The angel said, “Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to allow the Holy Spirit to come upon you. That's why your child is going to be called the Son of God. Furthermore, your relative Elizabeth, who is way older than you, is also pregnant. So, if you have any more questions about how God works, just talk with Elizabeth. For nothing will be impossible with God.”

And Mary responded, “Here I am, Lord. I am your servant.” Mary said yes to God out of her nothingness. Mary was able to believe in the angel and in herself because she was well aware of her unworthiness. For the rest of her life, Mary never took credit for being the mother of Jesus because she knew it was all God's doing. It was all God's mercy.

After the angel mentioned Elizabeth, Mary knew she had to go into the hill country of Judea to seek wisdom from her older kinswoman. When Elizabeth greeted Mary, her baby leaped in Mary's womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, said, “Blessed are you among women and blessed

is the fruit of your womb.

Another thing about the Magnificat is that this song is about God's mission for Jesus in this world. And it's about our mission as well. What Mary is telling us here is that Jesus is going to come into the world to bring justice. From the very beginning of time, there have been the have's and the have-not's. We have the people who don't count, which is the vast majority of the world's population. These are the poor and the oppressed and the ones who have no power. Then there are the rich, the powerful, and those who have influence in our world.

During this season of preparation for the coming of the Christ child, God has chosen you and has empowered you to serve by showing mercy, filling the hungry with good things, and bringing hope to the homeless, the helpless, and the hapless. For you are Christ's coming this Advent season. Christ is coming in you today and every day. Christ is coming to open your eyes to see injustice and human need with new eyes and then act in love.

Prayer: We are nobodies, Lord, but here we are. Fill us with your mercy, and us to bring in your reign to this world. For nothing will be impossible with God. Amen.