

Advent 4
Sun Dec 19, 2021
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Hope is the Expectation of Grace

Blessings on you this Fourth Sunday of Advent. Fourth Sunday of waiting for the coming of the Lord and the establishment of the throne of the messiah of Israel.

Hope. Hope is the focus of Advent. Hope is what we have when we realize that God is going to be there in the future. God is our future.

Hope is the expectation of grace.

1:39 In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.

Why did she head out? What was she hoping for? She had heard about her older distant relative and the good news of her pregnancy. She herself was miraculously pregnant. Perhaps there is some connection here, some connection she was seeking. We can't know, the text goes into no more detail.

Perhaps she was hoping for something. Hope is the expectation of grace.

Most of us lead pretty comfortable lives. Most of us adjust to our relative wealth and comfort and find the little annoyances of middle-class life so unbearable. We are comfortable enough, perhaps, to do a lot of traveling to see folks and get things done this time of year. When we set out, what are we hoping for? Is our

hope the expectation of grace? Or are we wasting our time hoping for something else?

Next in the Gospel this morning, something amazing happens.

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb.

Why did the baby leap in Elizabeth's womb? It may have been many things but there is one thing I am sure that it was. It was hope. Unborn John was designed by God to point to the Messiah. This unborn prophet leapt to tell the story of the one he anticipated, the one who had arrived in Mary's womb.

And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy."

Elizabeth hoped that Mary would give birth to the promised Messiah. Elizabeth was expecting grace; the gift of God to Israel. And there was Mary. Mary is full of grace.

They shared, with many in Israel, the hope of redemption. Hope is the expectation of grace.

What do we expect? When we turn our thoughts to the future, is God there? Or are we alone? Hope is the expectation of grace.

In our Gospel this morning, Elizabeth continues and says to Mary,

And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

And this provides Mary and opportunity to respond to Elizabeth,

And Mary said,

What the tradition will come to call the Magnificat. The Magnificat is a biblical canticle. The name comes from the Latin word, "to magnify." In our tradition, we pray it every Evening Prayer.

And Mary said,

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.

God chose Mary, and through Mary God has chosen us. God looks on the lowliness of his servant; his servant Mary; is servant you, his servant me.

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.

Surely all generations have called Mary blessed; highly favored one; full of grace. The mighty One has done great things for her, and through her; the mighty One has done great things for us, through her; and so we say, hallowed by thy 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.

Where do we find God. We find God with those who have realized that only God is there hope. That the only thing we can be sure to expect is that God will be in our future.

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."

For how long had Israel hoped for the Day of the Lord, for God to remember Israel, to visit her and never leave her again? And now, Mary joined God in God's future. The expectation of grace was being fulfilled in her womb filled with Grace, with the Word of God, with God.

Enjoy this last Sunday of Advent, 2021, this last almost full week to meditated on the sorrow-filled joy of the mystery of the Incarnation.

Can we learn of Mary about Hope during these last few days before Christmas, together?
Can Mary's hope for Israel catch us up and become our hope?

Hope is the expectation of grace.

We are looking forward to a lot of things in the next few days. Can we expect grace? Can we expect that God will be there, waiting for us, when the future arrives?

Hope is the expectation of grace. Amen.