

**December 19, 2021 The Fourth Sunday of Advent**

**The script is flipped for our last Sunday of waiting.**

**The in utero Baby John does a flip!**

**We've flipped from apocalypse and warning to camaraderie and support between the pair at center stage.**

**The powerful and enthroned aren't even named but we are promised positions will be flipped and they will be brought low by Mary's voice ringing out from the hill country.**

**The boy cousins who spoke powerfully for the last three Sundays are silent and we've flipped back to when their expectant mothers are the ones doing all the talking.**

**We've journeyed from when Jesus told us ominous signs are just initial birth pangs and now flipped back to when birth was several months away. Even though now we can count on one hand the number of nights we have left to wait until we celebrate the arrival of the newborn Christ child.**

**Are we ready?**

**Are we ready for the world to be flipped upside down?**

**That's what is supposed to happen here.**

**That is the character of the God whom Mary and Elizabeth love and serve.**

**But it's been a long time.**

**Long enough that sometimes as Christians, we forget. There was radical stuff going on in those days and it wasn't meant to just remain there. Mary speaks of the history of God caring for people and lifting up the lowly and projects it into the future as well. God will do what God has done before but now in a real and tangible and incarnate way through the as-yet unseen baby boy growing inside her.**

**There is much to be carried forward from these excited and determined women to us now. Not the least of which is their togetherness and support for one another. Each had come to this place in unusual and unsimplified ways.**

**Elizabeth had reached an advanced age as a respected wife of the priest Zechariah but there was always that asterisk.**

**That elephant in the room of her apparent barrenness. She would have known the looks, the whispers, the pity.**

**What had become the familiar sense of being not quite right, not quite whole in the eyes of the wider community, for Elizabeth would be just emerging for Mary. Her far-fetched story behind her pregnancy would elicit whispers, dirty looks and not so much pity as contempt. The teenager faced real danger, a candidate for stoning if too many questions were to be asked by certain people.**

**Mary could use somebody in her corner and in Elizabeth she had someone who had no hesitation and stood firm in heartening and inspiring her, helping her have an empowered and validated sense of herself when she might have needed it most.**

**We all can benefit from such relationships. We all can use an Elizabeth to be our head cheerleader and we could all help somebody out by stepping out in faith to encourage someone in such a way.**

**To say you are blessed and what you've got, that's God's gift, no one can take that away. To feel it in the belly and even in the bones. To embody the Spirit in a way that makes the good as real, more real even, than the physical aches, the mental worry, the inevitable creeping in of spiritual doubt.**

**Elizabeth is good with the flips. The joyous excitement expressed by her baby and giving voice to the way her relationship to Mary has changed. She wasn't just her young cousin anymore but by Elizabeth's own words, now the mother of my Lord.**

**She could have been jealous. She could have thought that her miracle now dimmed in comparison to what was revealed to her about Mary. But she allowed herself to magnify the Lord on her own way before Mary went on to proclaim the Magnificat.**

**And what a proclamation it is.**

**Blessed I am, Mary agrees. Not because she will have endless fame as Jesus' mother but because she has received this opportunity to serve God with her whole body, her whole spirit and whole being.**

**She taps into the way God has been revealed before to say "Yes! Yes and ..."**

**And the time is coming when all of God's justice and mercy will revealed.**

**We can tend to forget this, too, when we walk with God. That God means for us to be swept up in this mighty action of setting things right, of humbling the proud and satisfying the needs and the longing of the poor and hungry. But that when we lose track of what we are meant to be brought into, that voices like Mary's and Elizabeth's are going to remind us. God's plan is still being revealed and enacted, in corners we might not be peeking into right now but being lived and embodied nevertheless.**

**Salvation history feels like a tedious cycle sometimes. We might look at it and see, yep, God's people screw up, God sends messengers to point that out, the people deny, deny, deny until things get real desperate, then God restores a new beginning only to watch the people screw it all up all over again. And then this gets played on repeat.**

**But Jesus is coming.**

**And the script is gonna flip. The cycles are going to break. The inequalities are going to be addressed. The promises God has made are going to be fulfilled.**

**We wait just a little bit longer for that.**

**A little bit longer than five more nights, I'm afraid.**

**But as we wait, can we hear the hopeful, faith-filled and confident assurance Elizabeth and Mary voice echo in our hearts? Can we receive the Holy Spirit's stirring to action that expects good things be brought to those who haven't nearly enough of them? Can we expect better days are ahead no matter what may come between now and then? And if we**

**have gotten too full ourselves, or too full OF ourselves, can we stand to be sent away empty for a change and accept that others might have a turn?**

**I can't answer all these questions right now. God has answers to them that can change and adapt as suits the inclinations of the Holy Spirit. But I invite you to wonder about these things with excitement, with hope and anticipation for the goodness of God to be embodied here in this body of Christ. And for each member to bless this body with that energy. Amen and amen.**