

My Soul proclaims

Fourth Sunday in Advent (C)

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But you, O Mount Rat, who are one of the little centres of the diocese, from you shall come forth for me one who is to lead the people of God.

No this is not a bid to claim a prophesy for my future. But for you a reminder, that God does not need the largest of Congregations to act. I have been tied to small congregations for most of my ministry. I was the twenty-second rector at Cressy. In the 21 previous rectors, two went on to be Bishops and two to be Deans. And yet as a parish, we could be easily overlooked. We represented less than .3% of the state's population and contribute 1.3% of the diocesan budget.

My last parish Mooroolbark a small suburban centre had nurtured five clergy since the sixties including the current Archbishop of Perth. But this is God's point... Mary was a nobody. Around 14 years old – poor, with little social position or social clout. But God noticed, and in the story, the one who could be so easily overlooked, took her part in the great world changing events of the Christmas Season.

It was to this young woman that the angel came bringing news. This news can have some very negative effects in your life, ranging from renunciation of your betrothal by your fiancé to stoning in the town square. It is almost certainly a guarantee of extreme social and financial hardship. It would be difficult to overstate the hardship inherent in the news the angel brings Mary. How would you respond to a similar situation. Would You:

1. cry in a corner over your rotten luck.
2. scream at God for ruining your life.
3. seek a way to be rid of your very bad news.
4. tell your fiancé and hope (s)he understands.
5. praise God for all the wonderful things God has done for you.

That Mary said Yes is important, but how she said yes is the key. With the song of praise we now know as the Magnificat (and we sang together for the Psalm today) we get the real key for the Christian life.

In our popular culture, perhaps exemplified by the Oprah and the Dr Phil phenomena we are often reminded of the power of positive thinking. See each problem as an opportunity. Look for the possibilities. But this is not what Mary did. She drew on the one thing that will help us face anything that is before us. Her overwhelming belief that God cared and that God was in control.

We have with our education system set up a framework that expects everything to have a reason. Perhaps this relates to our societal diet of fiction (ie Television/Movies/Novels) in which everything in the story is there for a purpose, and we like the fictional detectives will pull it all together at the end. Indeed you will hear people say, when I get to heaven I will ask God about that. But be warned – this was how Job sought to solve his life's dilemmas. God's answer? Are you God? So how do you think you can understand God's thinking?

The Christian Journey is about accepting what God is offering us with faith that he is in control and not worrying about the details. In preparing for this one contributor quoted his favourite thinker, Randy Harris. Randy describes saints as:

- People who have put themselves at God's disposal.
- People who seek NOT to be safe, but to be faithful.
- People who have learned how to get along in adversity.
- People who are joyful.
- People who are kindlers and purifiers of "the Dream."
- People who are prayerful.

Mary's story is to remind us that we are not called to anything more than available in order for God to act. Our call as God's people, is to bring God's influence to those around us. We may not change the world, but we may just touch our neighbours. But let us not forget, that God cares, even for us and has control over what is happening.

By the way – I expect that in Heaven I will be with God so what else will matter.

AMEN