

In Nomine Jesu

Prayer Upon Entering Church: Stir up Your power, O Lord, we implore You, an come among us, that by Your grace whatever is hindered by our sins may yet be speedily accomplished through Your mercy and satisfaction; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Text

Luke 1:39-55

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, ⁴⁰and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, ⁴²and she ex claimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ⁴³And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."

⁴⁶And Mary said,

"My soul magnifies the Lord,

⁴⁷and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

⁴⁸for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.

For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

⁴⁹for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.

⁵⁰And his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.

⁵¹He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;

⁵²he has brought down the mighty from their thrones
and exalted those of humble estate;

⁵³he has filled the hungry with good things,

and the rich he has sent empty away.
54 He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
55 as he spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his offspring forever."

The Sermon
Learning To Be Little

There's something in us all – that loves to see the underdog finally get ahead – to see the little guy bring down the big bully. We share the joy of the little shopkeeper who wins the lottery. We share the joy of the hard working laundress who inherits a fortune. This is the stuff of fairy tales: Cinderella – raised from the dust and ashes of the hearth – to become a princess – the Ugly Duckling – turning out to be a swan.

The Little Engine That Could – finally makes it over that hill. Rudolf the Red-Nosed Reindeer – shunned at first for his odd and very shiny nose – later turns out to be **just** the one – Santa needed – to accomplish his Christmas Eve mission. Yes, this is the stuff of fantasy.

But it is also the stuff of salvation. Almost three thousand years ago – in a little suburb of Jerusalem – a little town belonging to the smallest clan in Judah – a little town called Bethlehem – an unlikely young man – came to the forefront of everyone's attention: David – son of Jesse – a shepherd boy who knock down the towering Philistine giant Goliath with his slingshot – and then would go on to become the greatest king of all Israel.

Another King would rise from the little town of Bethlehem. From this little backwater – from little ***Beth-lechem*** – (the house of bread) – One would come forth who would be great even to the ends of the earth. The prophet Micah predicted: "*This Child will become the Shepherd of His Flock. He will lead them with the strength of the Lord – with the Majestic Name of the Lord His God.*" (Micah 5:2-4)

Such stories – such promises – give hope to people living in the cold winter of their lives. Little Mary – the carpenter's wife par excel lance' – housewife extraordinaire – and working class mother-to-be – left her home

in upstate Galilee – to spend some time visiting her cousin Elizabeth – also soon to become a mother

And as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting – she felt the child leap in her womb – the yet unborn St. John the Baptist – already sensing – and wordlessly announcing – the arrival of his Lord – hidden – in His own blessed mother's womb. Elizabeth addressed Mary that day as “ *the most blessed of all women – and the Mother of my Lord* (Lk 1:42-43) – a Lord – only just conceived.

That's when Mary sang. And the song she sang has been repeated since in every language on planet earth. It is a reminder that our God is a Mighty One – a Mighty One who does great things – a God who lifts up the lowly – a God who afflicts the comfortable and comforts the afflicted – a God who fills the hungry with good things but sends the rich away empty – a God who – above all – is faithful to all His Promises.

Mary's song is the song of all the little people – of all the underdogs – of all the people who never got a fair shake in life – finally winning their reward. In Mary's Song – is summed up – all the history of God's Chosen People. There's an **advantage** – you see – to being little! Little people can fit into places big people can't. They **notice** things – that the big people – are too busy to see – or too caught up in their own importance – to **ever notice**.

The humble and meek have this advantage over the rich and powerful: they **pay attention**. They **listen**. They keep their eyes open. They have to! For they know – their very lives depend on it. The meek – unlike the proud – are receptive and open – to God's arrival. As Phillips Brooks' hymn says: “*Where meek souls will receive Him – still the dear Christ enters in.*”

When we become **little** – when we become **meek** – God dwells among us – **with** us – and **in** us – truly Emmanuel – God With Us. God chose Mary to bear His Son – as He chose Israel to be His People. It wasn't because Mary was great – but because Mary was **simple** – **humble** – **meek** – and **lowly** – that God chose her.

It was God – who **made** her great. It was God – who lifted up the lowly handmaiden – and made her to be the Mother of His Son – or as the Church has called her for two thousand years: *theotokos* – the God-bearer – the Mother of God. And that same meekness – that same humility – is available

to us today. We can be like Mary. We can open our hearts – to God – and to each other – to receive the Christ - who is always willing to enter into another human heart.

If God – even Almighty God – could become so little – an Infant lying in a manger – utterly dependent upon His Mother’s breast - an Infant lying helplessly in a feeding trough for the cattle – cannot we too shrink ourselves? Pare down our egos and our angers? Engage in a fast of righteousness – and shed the pounds of pride and past resentments – freeing ourselves to run like happy – naked – children – through the sprinklers of God’s abundant grace?

It **is** a challenge. It’s **hard** to become little – when you’ve gotten used to living large in this world. Israel had to learn that lesson over and over and over again. And so has the Church. We stumble and fall too. We’re so often told to act like grownups – that **big** is **better** – that **maturity** is judged by **power** - instead of wisdom – that the bottom line is **profit** – not **faith**. God have mercy on the Church – that is more concerned about **attendance** and **money** – as the bottom line – rather than **Keeping The Faith of the Church!** The first three chapters of Revelation are written to churches just like that – churches whose priorities were all messed up – who were more concerned about their institutional needs – and meeting people’s needs – than they were about **The Faith**.

You see – in the Kingdom – in God’s world – it is better – far better – to be like a trusting child in faith – like one of the blessed little ones – who behold God’s face in everything they see. So – brothers and sisters – let’s be **humble** and **lowly** and **meek** and **little** – together. We can watch with charity – and with faith – hold open the door of grace.

Our hands can lift up the lowly – as we are lifted up ourselves. Our hands can feed the hungry – as we are fed – at the hands of God. We can open our one-room hearts – that – by the grace of God – will become mansions – prepared for His Son at His Coming. *“O come to us – abide with us – our Lord Emmanuel!”* Amen.

“The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.”

Soli Deo Gloria!