

The Rev. Michael C. Fedewa
December 20, 2009
Advent 4c
Micah 5:2-5
Hebrews 10:5-10
Luke 1:39-55

I have spent much of the past week reflecting on the week I spent in Haiti. So many powerful memories. I have deeply appreciated the comments many of you have made to me after you read the letter I wrote about the trip. For those who have not received an email copy of the letter, there are copies of the letter printed at the entrances to the Church.

Many words come to mind as I continue to reflect on the Food for the Poor Pilgrimage---squalor, chaos, hunger, poverty, despair, filth. These desperate words seem so disconnected from the atmosphere present in the Church as we celebrate the 4th Sunday of Advent. These words seem so very far from the words of the Gospel which we just heard read. The heart of today's Gospel. The heart of the liturgy for the 4th Sunday of Advent is joy. So, I struggle. How to incorporate my continued reflections on the trip to Haiti, with the joy of our celebration this morning.

In Luke's Gospel, the angel Gabriel comes to Mary and announces that the Spirit of God will come upon her and that she will conceive and bear a son, Jesus. As proof of this, the Angel declares that her kinswoman, Elizabeth, who is old and barren, has also conceived a son. This has happened, Gabriel says: "Because, nothing is impossible with God."

Mary gives her consent to the angel and proceeds with haste to the hill country to visit Elizabeth. When Mary greets Elizabeth the child in Elizabeth's womb leaps for joy. Elizabeth has waited long to conceive a child. Israel has waited long for the coming of a savior. All is coming to fulfillment. It is time for rejoicing. But why?

I have long imagined that the rejoicing was over the birth of the anticipated births. And I suspect that this is true. But, while they are rejoicing in the coming births, there is also cause for worry and concern. Elizabeth and her husband are old. How will they be able to raise the son they have conceived? Mary is young, she is unmarried. How will Joseph and the people of Nazareth react? Will they believe her? Will Joseph abandon her? Will she be stoned for adultery? And how will the sons they have conceived be treated? Will Elizabeth's son be accepted as a herald of the Messiah? Will Mary's son be accepted as the Messiah?

There is cause for rejoicing here.. But there is also cause for concern.

At first glance, it might seem that the rejoicing of Elizabeth and Mary was unfounded. Both of their sons were rejected. Both of their sons were put to death. John was beheaded. Jesus crucified. But even in the face of their concerns - even in the face of the suffering that lay ahead for their sons, Elizabeth and Mary could rejoice because they trusted that the promises of God would be fulfilled.

This is at the heart of the rejoicing when Mary and Elizabeth came together. At the visitation, Elizabeth praises Mary because Mary trusted that "there would be fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord". Elizabeth rejoiced not only in her conceiving in her barrenness, or even in Mary's virgin conception, but Elizabeth rejoiced because Mary has trusted.

Mary trusted that God would accomplish through the son that she had conceived all that God had promised through the centuries. This was the reason for rejoicing. This was the reason for her to proclaim her wonderful prayer, the Magnificat. Because God was accomplishing all that had been promised, Mary could rejoice that God would bring to fulfillment all that had been promised. Mary could rejoice that God would show mercy. Mary could rejoice that God would scatter the proud, cast down the mighty, and send the rich away. Mary could rejoice that God would show the strength of his arm, lift up the lowly and fill the hungry with good things. Mary rejoiced because she trusted that the God who had formed life in her virgin womb and in the barren womb of Elizabeth would continue to do the impossible. Mary could rejoice because the reign of God was coming to birth.

Mary and Elizabeth invite us today to trust and to believe that God will bring to fulfillment all that has been promised. Mary and Elizabeth invite us to trust, and allow God to use us to accomplish the impossible. God wants to use us to lift up the lowly and fill the hungry with good.

When I was in Haiti I saw the promises of God being fulfilled. Through the ministries of Food for the Poor I saw God clothing the naked, embracing the outcast, feeding the hungry, caring for the sick, sheltering the homeless, welcoming the stranger. I saw God lifting up the lowly. I saw God filling the empty. I saw God showing mercy. In Haiti, I saw God in-the-flesh of men and women who were doing his work. I found reason to rejoice.

But dear friends, the God I saw at work in Haiti I also see at work in you. God is fulfilling the divine promise through the work of your hands, through the generosity of your hearts. Dear friends, I rejoice today because Jesus the son of God is even today being born in you. Dear friends, like Mary you are blessed when you believe that what has been spoken by the Lord, is being accomplished by you.