

## **FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT DECEMBER 23, 2018**

The revolution has begun. The revolution has shaken the earth for two thousand years. The revolution continues. The revolution first takes shape in the Judean home of Zechariah though he is entirely silent about its beginning. Two pregnant women are scheming and setting the stage for a human tsunami. The unborn children, John and Jesus, will bring the revolution into main view. Though both will be rejected, their deaths will be the seeds of new life that will never be extinguished.

The younger woman, Mary, may still be a teen-ager. Luke had introduced us to her in Nazareth where an angel greets her with unbelievable news. She is usually thought of as a meek, passive woman who is merely obedient to the wishes of God. "Let it be done to me according to your word." For the next two thousand years she is most often portrayed as a quiet, submissive woman for all of us to emulate. But this visit to her cousin in Judea brings forth her real depth. It turns out that she knew exactly what was going on. She was instilled deeply in the scriptures. She knew the ways of God. She actively is ready to cooperate in a new vision of life, called by her son the "reign of God on earth." In response to her cousin, the song we call the Magnificat, she accepts her role in the history of salvation:

"The Lord has looked upon this lowly servant. From this day all generations will call me blessed; the Almighty has done great things for me and holy is God's name."

Mary proceeds to sing of God's revolutionary plan to which she has been called to announce:

"God has scattered the proud in their conceit; has cast down the mighty from their thrones and has lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent away empty."

The revolutionary character of this intervention of God will finally become apparent in the birth of Jesus. The couple are on the road. They are forced to take a cave or stable for the birth of Mary's son. No royal robes.

The gospel message will threaten the human use of power, prestige and possessions. The Nativity of Jesus is the breaking-in of the humility of God which

Mary and Jesus embody. Human expectations and desires are thrown upside down.

Despite the church's failures at times, this message and presence of Jesus in the world has continued for two thousand years. The Roman Empire disappeared to be followed by other empires. Our own American empire is teetering on disaster. But the power of Jesus' words and message, his call to simplicity, love, forgiveness, compassion, humility, non-violence and service go on.

I have various thoughts on apparitions of Mary at different shrines throughout the world. People flock to these places seeking miracles which strike me not to be the center of the gospel message. But I have become aware of the significance of Mary's appearances at specific historical times when the simple gospel message was needed. In Mexico the Virgin of Guadalupe appeared in the guise of a poor Indian girl to a disheartened and poor Indian people under the power of the Spanish empire. The result, according to one, is the birth of Mexico with the mixture of Hispanic and Indian peoples.

Mary is said to appear at Fatima in Portugal when the communist revolution was threatening the Christian faith of the people. In Knock, Ireland, Mary appeared at a time when people were defeated following years of oppression and a famine that wiped out half of the country. Each time she appears to be one with suffering people.

I would not be surprised if Mary appeared to people today fleeing from their countries because of violence, warfare, and seeking a new home. Perhaps she has already appeared to people in the inner-cities of Baltimore or Chicago. Perhaps Mary is not always recognized.

In today's gospel story Mary has come in haste to visit her elderly cousin, Elizabeth, who has conceived a child in her old age. Luke says that Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She becomes the second schemer in the new revolution. She may be the first theologian of the new age as she somehow knows and understands the meaning of Mary's child. "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" She is in touch with the mind of God. She bursts forth in blessing. She is truly a prophet.

Elizabeth is the wise old woman whom Mary needs at this time. Mary finds a companion in her time of need. Elizabeth understands the importance of what both of them are going through. There is a great lesson here. I ask myself if there are any wise women in my life who encourage my journey with God. Of course there are. I think of them, thank God for them, pray for them. If you don't have one, ask God to send you an Elizabeth.

And this is how the revolution began. At times it dies down as followers of Jesus become complacent, comfortable, swallowed by the society around them with its emphasis on power, prestige and possessions. Christmas is a time to wake up, to contemplate what the birth of Jesus really means to me personally as well as to the world, and ask myself if I have become part of the revolution.

The promise of Christmas is the essence of Christian hope. The challenge of both is that we are called to be co-conspirators with Christ to advance this promise. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus become our map to the future. If we follow Jesus, accept Mary and Elizabeth as guides, we will be making the one journey in life that really matters.

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