

Advent 4C, 2009 (Baptism of Zachary Birkholz)

Text: Luke 1:39-56

Title: The Loud Women

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Advent is not a time to be quiet. Too often we mumble our prayers and whisper our songs, mouthing the words and hoping that no one hears us. But Advent is not a time to be quiet. Advent is a time to be bold, to be courageous. Advent is a time to be loud.

First it was the loud, boisterous crowd that greeted Jesus as He entered Jerusalem. Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! When the Pharisees tried to shut them up, Jesus said, if they would be silent, even the stones would cry out.

Next it was John the Baptist. His loud voice was the fire alarm that wakes us in the middle of the night. His cry is "Repent!" The kingdom of God is near.

Then we heard the loud question of John to Jesus, "Are you the one to come, or should we expect another?" Jesus responded with actions louder than words- healing the sick, raising the dead and preaching good news to the poor.

This week we hear two loud women- Mary and Elizabeth. Their loud voices echo still today in our ears and on our tongues.

You wouldn't expect these women to be so loud. Mary is only a girl. She is pregnant out of wedlock, something that could get her killed. She is young and we expect her to be quiet and shy and afraid. But she's not.

Elizabeth is an old woman. She is now finally pregnant. We expect her to be a little shy and embarrassed at the whole situation. But she's not.

The two women are bold and loud.

It begins with Mary's greeting to Elizabeth. Her voice fills Elizabeth with the Holy Spirit. The sound of her voice penetrates even inside of Elizabeth to her son John, growing within her. When John hears Mary's voice, he leaps for joy. Mary doesn't come sneaking in to Zachariah and Elizabeth's house. She doesn't quietly knock on the door in the middle of the night. No, she gives a loud greeting.

And then, Elizabeth responds with a loud voice, "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."

Elizabeth is so overjoyed that Mary has come to see her. You'd think it would be the other way around. Mary is the young girl, the unwed teenage mother. She's the one who is nervous and scared about the future. You'd think she would express how grateful she is to see Elizabeth.

But instead, Elizabeth and John are both overjoyed that Mary and Jesus have come to visit. They know that this is no ordinary visit, but that their Savior and His mother have to bless them.

Finally, Mary erupts in a song of praise, a loud, joyful song filled with praise to the Lord.

This is not just Mary's song. This is our song. We have sung the Magnificat every Sunday and every Wednesday this Advent. Today, we even sang it twice. It's not just Mary's song; it's our song, too.

This is our song because the Lord has done great things for us, too. We have reason to praise Him, too.

Advent is not just about what the Lord did when He came as a baby 2000 years ago. Advent is about the great things that the Lord continues to do when He comes to be with us today.

Jesus didn't just come to earth at Christmas and then leave us when He returned to the right hand of His heavenly Father. Jesus continues to come here to be with us today and every Sunday, here in this place. He visits us, just as He visited Elizabeth and John. He comes to do great things for us, as He did great things for Mary. And so we, too, sing along with Mary and the whole church, this song of praise.

Now we could spend the next few minutes analyzing and dissecting Mary's song. We could talk about its format and its symmetry- all of its literary features, but that's not the point.

With this song, Mary teaches us how to sing, how to praise God. The point is not to just analyze the details of Mary's song, but to sing along with her, to learn from her to praise God and to join with her in praising Him.

The Lord now dwells within us, just as He dwelt within His mother Mary. Just as the Holy Spirit bore the Word of God through Mary's ear and into her womb and she conceived the Christ child, so today the Word of God comes into you- in through your ears, in through your lips, and in through the skin of Zachary's forehead- the Word of God comes.

It's a dangerous thing to let the Lord's Word have their way with you. They change you, never leave you the same. God's Word bore Jesus to the virgin, and His Word carries Him inside of you as well.

And He fills your lips with songs of praise. The Lord makes you louder. The Lord makes you a singer to tell the world of everything that He has done for you. He gives you a song to sing, just like Mary.

Mary's song talks of the great reversal. How the Lord has taken the lowly, the humble, the weak, the poor and the hungry and exalted them, strengthened them enriched them and fed them. That is what the Lord did for Mary, and that is what the Lord does for you.

Like Mary, we are the lowly, the humble, the weak, the poor and the hungry. We have nothing praiseworthy in ourselves. It's not about us and how great we are.

We all began our lives like Zachary. Zachary is weak, hungry and helpless. He depends on his parents for everything. He can't take care of himself or his own needs.

This isn't just a physical condition, it's our spiritual condition as well. Zachary was conceived and born sinful. I know he's cute, but don't let that fool you. Zachary was a sinner in need of salvation. Just as Zachary cannot take care of his physical needs, he could not take care of his spiritual needs either.

We are all born sinful, helpless enemies of God.

But God still does great things for us. He doesn't leave us helpless.

The Lord has shown strength with His arm, as He reached down to bring salvation to Zachary and to each of us at our baptism.

In Holy Baptism He puts His holy name upon us and marks us as His own. In Holy Absolution He shows mercy to us and forgives us. In the Holy Supper He lifts us up and He feeds us.

So Mary's song is your song, and Zachary's, too, even though he's still learning the words. The Lord has done great things for Him today. Today He has reached out His arm and saved Him.

Zachary has been changed this morning. You can't see it and you might not notice it right away. Eventually you will notice Zachary getting louder. His parents and sponsors have promised to bring him here to hear God's Word. They have promised to teach him the Ten Commandments and the creed and the Lord's Prayer. They have promised to prepare him to receive the Lord's Supper.

Basically, they have promised to let the Lord continue to be involved in Zachary's life- to put God's Word in Zachary's ears and on his lips and on his tongue and in his mouth.

But Zachary's parents and sponsors are not the only ones to make promises this morning. The Lord Himself has promised to be with Zachary throughout His life. He has marked Zachary, branded him, tattooed His Name on Zachary's forehead, and that Name will be with Zachary forever.

The name Zachary means, "The Lord remembers." The Lord will remember Zachary, because the Lord has put His name on him this morning. The Lord will never forget you, Zachary, he will never leave you or forsake you.

At the end of Mary's song, she concludes with these words, "He has helped His servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy, as He spoke to our Fathers, to Abraham and His offspring forever."

The Lord remembered His promises to Israel and to Abraham and sent His Son, born of the virgin Mary, to be our Savior.

The Lord will remember His promises to Zachary and to each of us, as He made us His own in Holy Baptism.

It's a reason to sing. It's a reason to be loud. Because it's only going to get louder.

"¹Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. ²And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. ³And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders."

We are the ones with the name of the Lamb and the Father written on our foreheads. That's us, and Zachary, too. So let's stand to sing.