

**“A World Upside-Down”**  
Rev. Jayneann McIntosh  
First United Methodist Church of Wausau  
Advent 4b; December 24, 2017

Luke 1:26-55

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. And he came to her and said, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.” But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.” Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.” And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

UNICEF estimates that an average of 4.3 babies are born every second of every day somewhere in the world.<sup>1</sup> In the midst of Hurricane Irma, a woman in Coral Springs gave birth to her daughter on her bathroom floor with her mother assisting until emergency workers arrived. Another woman – in Miami – delivered her baby girl herself, with coaching assistance from an EMT over the telephone.

---

<sup>1</sup> [theworldcounts.com/stories/How-Many-Babies-Are-Born-Each-Day](http://theworldcounts.com/stories/How-Many-Babies-Are-Born-Each-Day)

Babies are born during tornadoes, floods, and earthquakes. Babies are born healthy and babies are born with medical challenges. They're born in cities under siege and in refugee camps. They're born to single women, to married gay men; to people who are prepared, and to women who didn't know they were pregnant until they went into labor. Babies are born into every conceivable condition in our world.

And every time a baby is born, lives change. Individuals are changed. Families are changed. Worlds are turned upside down.

We've all been part of such stories, even if only peripherally. When a child enters a family, the dynamics of every relationship change. When someone new joins our extended family or faith community, roles shift. People who previously hadn't paid attention to babies find themselves watching one in the pew in front of them. Other people find themselves feeling things they'd never felt before. Families, individuals and groups enter in new territory as some suddenly need to ask for help where they never had before and others are offering things they never thought they'd share. Some find that parenthood – or grand-parenting – comes naturally to them. Others are alarmed when it's more complicated than they'd believed.

Our scripture lessons today are about this reshaping of community. Both women are surprisingly pregnant. They have something in common they never thought they'd share. They have things to talk about together like never before.

“Who would have thought?” ... “Can you believe it?” ... “It's incredible!” “God is amazing.” “Did you get sick?” We can just imagine other parts of their conversation that Luke didn't include.

During both of my pregnancies, I was filled with anticipation. Everything seemed new – with infinite possibilities. Who would this child growing within be become? What would they be like? What would parenthood require of me? From the moment I knew I was expecting, I knew my world was being turned upside-down. Mary, Elizabeth and many of you will have had similar experiences.

I don't know much about the musical *Hamilton*, but Lin-Manuel Miranda's lyrics for “The World Turned Upside Down” speak of similar things. Alexander Hamilton is preparing to lead his men at the Battle of Yorktown. He sings about his wife who not only expects to see him again, whole and healthy, but is also expecting their child. The birthing of both child and nation are held in the tension.

The world turned upside-down is what God is about when revealing to Mary that she will have this child Jesus. Elizabeth's son will live and die so that the world might have advanced notice of this amazing turn of events.

Those who are comfortable with things as they are do not want to see change. This was true then and it's true today. But to all those who struggle with poverty, loneliness, illness, oppression, a loss of hope, or any kind of despair, this is great good news. God is coming among us. God care, really cares!

Mary is among that latter group – a poor young woman in a backwater village that no one cares about unless they live there, with Roman peacekeepers wherever you look.

The life she thought she would live is changed in an instant. Yet, she responds with quiet acceptance and even joy. She chooses courage. God's joy will be her strength in whatever's ahead.

Then will come the birth. At its most intimate level, a birth involves only a new, young family, just getting to know each other.

Yet, any birth but especially this one affect the whole world. Any small change creates ripples that lead to more change. God knows. In Jesus, God intends for the world to become a welcome, caring and just place for everyone – not just the comfortable ones, the ones with power or the right connections.

With this birth of the Christ child, God calls forth a new world order. Emmanuel, God-with-us, changes everything.

We live in a culture that tells us we can't make a difference. Only we can. We are stronger than some would have us believe. When we let God's love give us courage we can be unstoppable.

We live in a culture that tells us to be afraid – afraid of one another, afraid of growth, afraid of disagreement, afraid of knowledge... That culture tells us to protect ourselves, to buy a gun, to be on guard, to play it safe. Yet this is exactly the opposite of what we hear from God today and tonight.

The angel said, "Don't be afraid, Mary. God is honoring you."

The angel said [to the shepherds], "Don't be afraid! Look! I bring good news to you— wonderful, joyous news for all people. Your savior is born today in David's city. He is Christ the Lord" (2:10-12).

I'm not saying we'll never be afraid, but we need to work at not giving into the fear that's everywhere around us. We need to practice love. "There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear" (1 John 4:18).

Mary chose to let God's love give her courage. And the world changed. Every time we accept that same amazing, powerful love, we have the potential to change the world. And that is exactly what God calls us to do.

Advent is a time not only of anticipating Christ's coming but of coming into our own fullness in Christ as we step out in courage trusting in God's love.