

"THE GIFT OF UNEXPECTED GOOD NEWS"

Luke 1:26-55

December 20, 2020

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At first, you don't fully believe it. It doesn't seem quite real. Then it sinks in, and everything suddenly shifts. You feel lighter. The world seems a better place. New possibilities open up.

There's nothing quite like getting unexpected good news:

You got the job after all.
The diagnosis isn't as dire as you feared.
A new grandchild is on the way.
Your big project has been recognized and rewarded at last.
A long-lost friend gets in touch.
Distribution of the vaccine has begun.

News of that nature change your perspective – your expectations, your plans, your picture of the future, your sense of yourself, your outlook on life.

Mary must have experienced that kind of changed perspective. Once she comprehended the angel's words, she must have understood that her life would never be the same. *She* would never be the same.

I wonder if at first it really felt like good news, though. She must have felt concern about how she would cope with unexpected pregnancy... but beyond that, I suspect she realized pretty quickly that her newly-rearranged life was going to demand a degree of faith and strength she'd not ever expected to need. I wonder, if she might have sense that it would also mean sacrifice, and sorrow.

Sometimes it's easy to tell that news is good news. Sometimes, when what we hear is unexpected, it's harder to perceive, or get to, the good news part.

This year, many of us were disappointed when it became clear that our loved ones couldn't be with us for Christmas. But there is good news in that: we, and they, are safer, and we love one another enough to make sacrifices to keep others safe.

I hated to hear that we should be cautious about restaurant dining; I really miss going out to dinner. But the good news is that we've saved a lot of money!

Learning that in-person worship was risky made us sad, and we miss seeing each other... but the good news is that the church is resilient, and we remain connected and committed.

We didn't want to hear that we needed to worship and have meetings virtually... but look at all we have learned, and the opportunities this has opened up to connect with people in different places.

Good news doesn't always sound 100 per cent positive at first, and sometimes it comes tangled up with bad news, or what seems like bad news. It can take a little time, maybe a bit of wondering, and an attitude of openness and trust to get to the good news.

Mary got to the good news. We have her song of praise and joy to tell us that. We call it the "Magnificat" (because that's the first word of it in Latin), and when we hear it, it's very clear that not only has she embraced the angel's news, she's become a teller of the good news herself.

But *is* it good news? Is it good news for everyone?

Some people might hear it and be skeptical. Mercy sounds great, and it's certainly very much needed. Raising up the lowly and filling the bellies of the hungry sound like good news for many, many people.

It *doesn't* sound like especially good news, though, for the proud, the powerful, or the rich, who are to be scattered, brought down, and sent away empty. (And I have a sneaking suspicion that we may have more in common with them than with the lowly and hungry!) Can this be good news for us?

Maybe it's that sort of unexpected good news that is hard to recognize at first.

We've had some of that kind of news this year:

We've learned that our differences are in some ways more fundamental than we thought. That we are going to have to come to some reckoning with our history of racism. That our safety net has gaping holes.

The inequities in our society have been exposed for all to see. It's become clearer than ever that our way of life isn't sustainable. The importance of our connections to one another was brought home to us in a new way.

We realized that there are things and people we ought to have been more grateful for. We learned that some things are not as important as we thought they were. We discovered that we are set in our ways, and that change is hard but necessary.

None of that sounds like good news. But it IS. Because it's always good news when we gain understanding, when we grow. Because truth is, ultimately, good news, and the necessary beginning to healing these broken places in ourselves and our world. Because it's good news that God is leading us to transformation.

It's good news because when no one is hungry
or disempowered
or despised... there can be community.

Mary's song expresses a personal faith and commitment. But it's more than that. Its *joy* really lies in the fact that it celebrates a good news that is for all. It reflects a vision of the beloved community. It anticipates the community that will be formed by and around her son, the community that eventually will be the church.

Listen again to the surprising news of Mary's song: God's mercy and justice and truth are transforming us, and enfolding us in the beloved community, and giving us a new understanding of our lives and our world. God comes to us in Jesus to bring hope and healing, to lead us, and to be with us in that journey.

And like Mary: Know in your heart that this IS good news, and sing it, and share it, with trust and hope, expectation and joy.

Amen.