

## **“Not Yet” – Luke 1: 39-55**

As you and I sit here on December 23, there is a part of us that thinks Christmas is already here. Look around. People have left for the holiday. People have come in or home for the holiday. Many of us have already celebrated Christmas with parts of our family because we won't see them on Christmas Day. Many of you are pleased that we will finally sing a Christmas carol, even if it is not a particularly popular one, at the close of worship.

And yet, as we gather this morning we hear about Mary's visit to Elizabeth. We hear the Magnificat, and are reminded that it is not Christmas, not yet. Amid all the hype, chatter and excitement associated with Christmas, we hear a story about,

*Two unimportant women, (at least by their society's standards). One named Mary, who is to marry Joseph, the Carpenter. The other Elizabeth, the wife of Zechariah, the priest. And what are they talking about? The babies they were expecting.*

*(concept taken from Advent, the Gift of Hope by Christopher Webber)*

You may think, *It's a nice story, but why tell it now? Why tell it so close to Christmas when we are thinking about and focused on so many other things? What value does it have?*

*I am reminded of an email exchange I recently had with a certain church organist friend about leading worship on this Sunday. I commented that it is a tough Sunday to preach. This friend offered me the following response. 'How hard can it be to preach then? It's not like anyone is excited or anything. Jesus is coming tomorrow, hooray! And P.S. you only have 24 hours to finish your shopping. And, God will forgive you if you don't have that special little something wrapped under the tree even if your wife won't. Sounds like a winner to me! Maybe I should be a preacher!' At the time I chuckled, thinking that is exactly the problem.*

In preparing for today, I thought about this email exchange, and how the message for today is, *not yet. Christmas is not ours to rush into, it is God's to offer and reveal.* Christmas doesn't happen on our time schedule. It happens on God's, and the tension that this creates is a reminder that we do not control when and where God will reveal God's self.

In the same way, we do not decide who God uses to reveal God's plan. That too is God's decision. As this story and others in the Bible remind us, often God works not through those we think of as powerful or important, but rather, through those society thinks of as lesser in stature. It is one of the ways God reminds us it is not all about us.

This message is affirmed in the Magnificat, also known as Hannah's prayer, where Mary proclaims among other things,

*My spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for God has looked with favor on the lowliness of God's servant.  
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;  
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,  
and holy is God's name.*

About six weeks ago I was introduced to a new parenting book, 123 Magic. I read the book, was impressed by it, and mentioned it to some of our families with small children. Many had heard of it. Some who hadn't, read it and found it helpful. The book talks about three components of parenting. What I took away from the section on discipline was the value of time-outs. Explaining things or rationalizing with younger children doesn't work. They are not ready to process what you are saying. When they misbehave you simply say, "That's 1."

When it happens again, "That's 2." The third time means a time out. No lecturing, no nagging, no getting angry. When it's over, it's over.

I think the time-outs serve three purposes. First, it gives the child a chance to break the cycle of behavior, stimulation, frustration, whatever, and regroup. It also allows what happened to be in the past, as the child is given the opportunity to start over. Thirdly, it reminds the child who is in charge, who is the adult, the protector, the establisher of order, the one who calls the shots if you will.

I mention this because I think it applies to today's scripture reading. Amid the craziness of Christmas, our rush to get to Christmas, and our desire to dictate when Christmas happens, today's scripture reminds us that we do not call the shots. God does. God does it gracefully, but still God is in charge. Sometimes we need to be reminded of this.

The world may want to tell us it is Christmas. We may even be celebrating Christmas, the holiday, but that doesn't make it Christmas, the holy day. That is not our call to make, it is God's. So, keep doing what you have been doing. Keep preparing and get ready, Christmas will be here soon enough.