Earlier we read this beautifully written *Song of Mary*, commonly known as the ***Magnificat*** meaning “magnified” in Latin. It is a song of praise describing the unexpected **mixed emotion of Fear as well as Faith** from the expecting mother-to-be Mary. We don’t know whether Mary actually sang this song, or whether it was a song written later on about Mary. But through the words that were sung, we could sense not only Mary’s fear, but also her inner excitement and jubilation of being chosen as the one who would bear God’s son. This is quite extraordinary for an unwedded teenage girl to take on.

Keep in mind by saying “Yes” to God, Mary could subject herself to public shame and humiliation or even being stoned to death by her community for adultery. Joseph could’ve walked away and called off their engagement entirely, but he chose not to take that route. Out of respect and love for Mary, Joseph chose to do what was right for Mary and noble for humanity. So these were the circumstances of Mary and Joseph’s unexpected 1st Christmas. It was filled with a lot of fears and uncertainties for Mary and Joseph.

Joseph and Mary didn’t go back home and live happily ever after. Their night of peace and “silence” proved only to be short lived. They had to be on the run, fleeing from the pursuit by Herod’s soldiers and the order of massacre of every male child under the age of 2. They fled to become migrant refugees while fleeing into another country (Egypt) until they were safe to return. Throughout this whole ordeal, Joseph stayed with Mary as a faithful and loyal husband.

As you can see, through Mary and Joseph’s unexpected 1st Christmas, God had other agenda and purpose in mind that were beyond our human comprehension. This is a good reminder for us all also, that we might plan and prepare all we want, always allow room for God’s will to be manifested in our lives. **God had also chosen ordinary people (including you and me) to carry out extra-ordinary tasks.**

In our story today, we’ve also read about the encounter between Mary and her cousin, Elizabeth. Both were expecting a child with a few months apart, both under unusual circumstances as well - one being a much older woman who had been barren and past beyond her child-bearing age, and the other was an unwedded teenage virgin. Both of these women were unexpectedly expecting…Talk about irony or perhaps God’s sense of humor!

Furthermore, this also marked the first encounter between the two miracle children who were still in their mothers’ wombs. What’s surprising to me, as I was re-reading this story again, was that both Zachariah (Elizabeth’s husband) and Joseph were nowhere mentioned in our passage today. The focus was definitely not on them but on the two mothers-to-be. Zachariah, as you recall, was muted by God when he found out in disbelief that his aging wife Elizabeth had become pregnant.[[1]](#footnote-1)

**The births of John and Jesus would not only shape the course of human history, and also re-define and redeem the once broken relationship between God and humanity. Both John and Jesus were sent in order to restore order, justice, and peace in this desperate world.** These were Divine acts where God made what seemed impossible possible, for we know that *nothing is impossible with God*.[[2]](#footnote-2)

In the case of both Mary and Elizabeth, God believed in them and conversely they believed in God by offering their lives to be used by God. This was their response to God’s calling in their lives. As one theologian (N.T. Wright) summed up this unique chosen appointment of Mary and Elizabeth as follows. Wright wrote, *“God’s purpose and plans for humanity were first revealed in a private meeting between two women on the edge of society.”* Elizabeth in her old age arrived from a circumstance too late to have a child; Mary in her youth came from a circumstance too soon for a child. Both were marginalized yet chosen by God to answer their calls. They made themselves available for God’s purpose and for God’s plan.

God did not choose those who are the most qualified, but God chose those who are obedient and faithful and those who are willing to make the personal sacrifice. **In the case of Mary and Elizabeth, God moved those who are situated on the margins of society and placed them at the center of God’s activities and plans.** This was all part of God’s happening.

As Mary proclaimed, ***“Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”[[3]](#footnote-3)*** What a powerful statement of courage and faith that often gets overshadowed by the birth narrative and the rest of the Christmas scene!

By faith, Mary believed the angel’s words and agreed to bear this God-child fulfilling the prophecy of a Messiah*. “Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."[[4]](#footnote-4)*

*"Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God”,* the angel proclaimed. “*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. 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.”[[5]](#footnote-5)*

Come to think of it, like Mary, Elizabeth, Joseph and Zachariah, many of us today may also be living under extraordinary fears and anxieties, whether they are visible and invisible. We have inner fears that perhaps we do not want others to know about or we are too ashamed of. We may have fear for the welfare of our children, our family and loved ones. We fear for crimes and violence both abroad and in our own neighborhood. We fear for our work….of not having enough or having too much of. We fear for the world or the environment in which we live, how we have exploited and neglected over the years and failed to do our parts to be good stewards of it. We fear of being lonely and friendless, especially during this time of the season. We fear for the uncertainty of our future…what’s going to happen to us tomorrow? The list goes on and on…

But God made the ultimate assurance to us through the angels’ visits to the lowly shepherds out in the wilderness. *"Do not be afraid; for see -- I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: 11 to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah,1 the Lord. 12 This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"[[6]](#footnote-6)*

Both Mary and Elizabeth have demonstrated to us that we too can turn our Fears into Faith trusting that our sovereign God is ultimately in control. According to the Promise, God remains actively involved in this world. As hopeless as this world’s affair may seem at times, God has not given up on God’s people just yet. Through this unconditional Promise, God re-affirmed and renewed the covenant that was once established to our ancestors, but is now passed onto us today, as the Lord declared **“*I will walk among you, and [I] will be your God, and you shall be my people.[[7]](#footnote-7)***

God has heard the cries of the people by sending His incarnate Son Jesus Christ, who is the Prince of Peace and our Wonderful Counselor, into the human world surrounded by human sins of violence, hatred and bloodshed. God grieves alongside with us as well. **It is through this troubling world and turbulent time that our greatest fears may be overcome by God’s promises of JOY and PEACE in our hearts.** This is God’s challenge for us not only during the 1st Christmas, as Mary and Joseph journeyed through foreign land for their child’s safety. It is God’s challenge for us today as well!

Friends, through the darkest night, we can still find this glimmer of hope through this **light of Christ in the midst of God’s on-going revelations to this world.** This light of Christ will outshine all the darkness of evil of this world and will restore hope for our futures.

Earlier in our worship service, we lit the 4th candle of Advent – which is the candle of LOVE…this candle is also a candle of God’s fulfilled promise. **It is Christ’s Love that binds us all together in perfect harmony and restore our relationships in this schismatic society.** It is Christ’s LOVE that sustains us, nurtures us, and casts out all of our fears.[[8]](#footnote-8)

During this season of unexpected expectations, **let us prepare our hearts once again by making room for Christ in our lives.** For God has called us out and challenged us, just as God called Mary, Joseph, Elizabeth and Zachariah out of our comfort zones and granted us peace and assurance of God’s Promise.

*"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.”[[9]](#footnote-9)*

**Through Christ, God has claimed us by fulfilling His promise and is challenging us to reclaim God’s mission in our lives today! Christ has come and Christ will come again.** Thanks be to God. In the name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *Luke 1:20* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Luke 1:37* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Luke 1:38* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Luke 1:45* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Luke 1:30-32 and 35* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Luke 2:10-14* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *Leviticus 26:12* [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. *I John 4:18* [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. *Luke 1:46-50* [↑](#footnote-ref-9)