

Today we light the rose candle, it's Gaudete Sunday.

That's the Latin word for rejoice.

Today, while it is not yet Christmas,

we rejoice knowing God is at work and the long-awaited Messiah

is to be born through a particular person, Mary.

What we hear this morning,

sung by our choir,

is her song of praise and thanksgiving

for how God's plan of liberation and salvation

promised long ago

is still being fulfilled through the baby she is carries.

On hearing from the angel Gabriel

that she had conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit

and that she was to give birth to the Son of God

immediately went south,
near Jerusalem,
to spend time with her relative Elizabeth
who was also expecting a child.

Mary was barely more than a teenager,
while Elizabeth could have been in her fifties.

Mary was to remain there with Elizabeth
for the next three months (v.46).

The angel Gabriel
had already said that Elizabeth was in her sixth month (v.36)
and so Mary stayed with Elizabeth
caring and working for Elizabeth
until her baby, John, was born.

Then Mary left this place of safety

back to Nazareth in the hills of Galilee.

There she did not go to Joseph's home

but to her own home.

By this time her pregnancy would have been noticeable to all,

but after these months away in Judea

she was prepared for what lay ahead

strengthened by the support she had had from Elizabeth.

Joseph had also been prepared for her coming back pregnant,

Gabriel having appeared to him in a dream, telling him,

"Joseph son of David,

do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife,

because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

She will give birth to a son,

and you are to give him the name Jesus,

because he will save his people from their sins” (Matt 1:20&21).

So, soon Mary and Joseph were married.

However, before all that takes place, we hear Mary’s own prayer,

which she uttered in response

to the words Elizabeth had spoken to her.

It is called the Magnificat

from the first word of the Latin Vulgate translation of Luke’s gospel,

Magnificat,

“My soul magnifies the Lord.”

These ten verses are full of scriptures of the Old Testament.

These are virtually the only words of Mary recorded in the Bible.

We know next to nothing about Mary

until we read these words which are pregnant with Scripture.

We hear echoes of Psalm 103, and to Psalm 22, and to Psalm 44, and to Psalm 89, and to Psalm 98, and to Psalm 147, and to Psalm 25.

Mary is emboldened to praise God's gracious and glorious intervention in the lives of the people of God.

We hear the song of Moses in Exodus 15, and his sister Miriam as they sung praises to God

for the rescue from the Egyptians at the Red Sea.

But most of the prayer comes from a woman named Hannah's prayer of I Samuel 2. Hannah said, "There is none holy like the Lord," and Mary says, "Holy is his name." Hannah said, "Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry have ceased to hunger" and Mary says, "He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty." Mary knew that he had exalted Abraham, and Moses, and Samuel, and David, and Esther, and Daniel. Liberation of the poor and downtrodden is God's mode of operation.

Theologically, liberation, at the very epicenter of Christianity, represents Scripture through the plight of those in “bondage.” Our discipleship in Jesus is to seek out a just society where all benefit. “And what does the Lord require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8).”

To follow Jesus is to give preference to those who have historically been marginalized or deprived of their rights. As such, the faith we live out should grow out of the perspective of the poor and disenfranchised. Defending the rights of those in bondage is viewed as the central aspect of the gospel.

Mary says, “He has brought down rulers from their thrones / but has lifted up the humble. / He has filled the hungry with good things / but has sent the rich away empty.” Mary is expressing joy that God has liberated the materially poor and fed the physically hungry while bringing down the materially rich. He is a God, in other words, who favors the destitute over those with wealth.

The Bible certainly teaches followers of Christ to care for the poor. “If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? (James 2:15-16). But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees someone in need, and shuts up his heart from them, how does the love of God abide in us? (1 John 3:17).

Then the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. (Luke 2:10). Visitors to the Christ Child included both shepherds and magi; both groups were welcome. God does not assign special status to any group. No group is to be perceived as being preferred by God. God does not discriminate.

Liberation is at the very heart of Christianity. As true followers of Jesus we are called to strive toward a just society. Liberation must begin at home. We are challenged to free our own minds in order that we have

a clearer view of what God expects of us. Yes, we are certainly in this world, but we are admonished not to be of this world. We are to “not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your (our) mind, that you (we) may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:2).

This is the life Christian is being brought into. A life where he dies to his own desires and self-interests to benefit others. His parents and god-parents make vows this morning, in the presence of God, to raise her as a disciple of Jesus.

They are making vows for Christian, just like the life-long vows at marriage, “Will you be responsible for seeing that Vera Le is brought up in the Christian faith and life?

Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as her Lord?

Then we make a solemn vow to Vera Le, “Will you who witness these vows do all in your power to support Vera in her life in Christ?

We promise to model before her what persisting evil looks like, how to repent and return to the grace of God through repentance. She is to proclaim through her words and how she lives her life the good news of God in Christ to all people. By being part of this Christian community, we vow to show her through our behavior what seeking and serving Christ in all people, loving our neighbor as ourselves. Together with her parents and god-parents, we vow to strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being.