

Advent 4C
Luke 1:39-55
20 December 2009
Christ Church

Every Thursday morning at 7:00, I meet with our senior and junior wardens, Sheli Dunn and Pam South, at the Northern Star Coffee Shop. We discuss the business of the parish and do long- and short-range planning. This past Thursday, Sheli asked if I needed any money for my discretionary fund.

I responded that, in recent weeks, the parish had given generously to the account, and I thought we were in pretty good shape. Wouldn't you know it? That very day, four people contacted me asking for help paying their rent. By the end of Thursday, I was ready to call Sheli to let her know my discretionary account was no longer full. In one short afternoon, it was drained considerably.

Earlier that day, I had stopped for a quick lunch when a thin man, wearing a threadbare jacket, approached me in the

parking lot. He asked if I would buy lunch for him, his wife and children. When I returned to the office after lunch, I received a call from a man who had lost his job and his home. He needed money for an extended-stay hotel.

Not long after that, a couple came to the office asking for help with Christmas for their three little children.

I stayed late at work, since I was going to the airport to meet my son, John, who was flying in from New York. But just before I left, Beth, our volunteer parish administrator, came and told me that a woman was waiting to see me in the main office.

When I walked in, the woman was weeping – and shivering. She had walked a long distance to come to our church. Her husband had recently left her, and she needed money to pay for an extended-stay hotel.

This woman was so distraught that I asked if she would like for me to pray with her. She eagerly reached out to take my hands, and then bowed her head. Her hands were icy cold.

When I wrote her a check, the relief in her face was dramatic. Before she left, she hugged me.

As I drove to the airport, I began to ponder the sequence of events of the day. I was feeling sad, and somewhat overwhelmed. With all the pain and trouble and seemingly intractable problems in the world, it's easy for us to lose perspective; to think that the world is no good; to cave in to despair. From the vantage point of a minister or social worker, it's obvious that the world is in a mess.

It is difficult to ignore the fact that we pay professional athletes enormous salaries, which tempts some of them into lives of emotional and spiritual bankruptcy. At the same time, we watch as the poor among us continue to grow in number – especially right now. We wonder what will become of us!

As we read the Gospel this morning, it's easy to imagine that the world of 1st Century Jewish Christians was not unlike ours. The Gospels reflect the same concerns about struggling humanity that we have today. Mary and Elizabeth live in a

land occupied and oppressed by the Romans. Poverty, disease, and hopelessness are the daily lot of the poor. Yet Mary, an insignificant peasant woman, is chosen by God to bring the Savior of humankind into the world.

In the presence of her cousin Elizabeth, Mary's heart overflows into a Song of Praise. It is so beautiful, and expresses such a grand vision, that we've come to call Mary's song the "Magnificat."

"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.”

Mary’s exultant song echoes a song of praise from the Old Testament: the song delivered by Hannah in I Samuel. Hannah, thought to be barren, discovers that she is with child – a miracle of God. And her son, of course, is Samuel, who becomes one of the great judges of Israel. That which appears empty and lost becomes the bearer of greatness. God chooses the seemingly insignificant and lowly over those of high degree to work His will.

It is difficult to think that the woman who came to my office desperate and shivering from the cold was raised up in God’s eyes at that moment. How can that be? But Mary’s Song reminds us that God has not forgotten this woman who came to Christ Church weeping.

God’s own son is born into our world poor, homeless, and fragile. Yet, through this peasant child, God’s miraculous saving power enters into human history ... showing us the

**Way ... bringing us hope that death, sorrow, despair,
loneliness, and sickness do not have the final word. When we
hold fast to Christ – and wait with patience – God comes to us
just as we need Him: born, not in a palace, but in the night air
among poor, ordinary folk who *know* how much they need
God's help.**

**May our souls magnify the hope and love of the Christ
Child!**