

Bearing God-Seed, Emanuel

C-Advent 4; Micah 5:2-5a; Luke 1:39-55; 12/23/18

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Sermon-in-a-Sentence: We all, like Mary, have the opportunity, individually, and as a community, to accept and carry in us the God-Seed, Emanuel; and, if we are willing, to go through great suffering, to give birth to and nurture a “child” who will help bring about God’s Kingdom, and make our lives “blessed.”

Adult Sermon:

As we prepare to celebrate Christmas, will we be simply remembering and celebrating a historical and religious event that has had a huge impact on the world and upon each of us as Christians? Or, will we be remembering and celebrating a story that vividly illustrates to us how God and God’s Kingdom can be made manifest in and through each of us, birthed through us, individually and as a community, to make a difference in the world, for the sake of all God’s children and all creation? Hopefully both.

In our Gospel story, two women have become pregnant. Each of them has had a mysterious encounter with the Divine, and have been promised that their pregnancy and their child will, in some way, have a huge impact on bringing about God’s Kingdom. And, when they come together and share their stories and experience, they each have an even deeper epiphany, and begin to understand and proclaim on a much deeper level, what God is up to through their pregnancies.

Pregnancy and giving birth to and raising a child; and then sending that child out into the world to bear fruit, are powerful metaphors of our Spiritual journey with God. Becoming pregnant, and going through the process and giving birth is such a mysterious journey, even today when we have lots of scientific explanations about what and how all this happens in a woman’s body. Still, so much of it is out of our control and beyond our understanding. And yet very, very tangible.

Somehow a seed is planted. And to many mothers, this mystery of pregnancy and giving birth, and sending their child out into the scary world, is the most difficult and precarious, and for many, painful journey they will every travel. And, it is also the or among the most blessed and life-giving experiences they will ever encounter.

It is never easy. There is always great suffering in the journey of birthing and raising children, and sending them out into the world. Both Elizabeth and Mary saw their blessed children violently murdered by the powerful and privileged. And yet the seed they carried and the children they birthed and the mission their children carried out, still made their lives incredibly meaningful and rich, “blessed.”

“Surely from now on, all generations will call me, [Mary,] blessed.”

You cannot be a saint if you are not willing to suffer. Name one saint who did not suffer, greatly. God is always trying to plant Emmanuel-Seeds, God-with-us-seeds in each of our lives. And God is always calling us to nurture these mysterious seeds, and to endure the great challenges and suffering that is always a part of pregnancy and birthing and raising the God child, Emmanuel, within us.

Sometimes, we refuse to accept or bear these “holy” seeds. Sometimes we are blinded or distracted by the things of the world, and so, nothing happens. Sometimes we fear that bearing these mysterious and challenging God-seeds will get us into trouble, or interfere with the “good-life” our culture is constantly urging us to pursue. Sometimes we think that the real goal of our life is to avoid and minimize suffering. And our wombs shrink, and the seed of Emmanuel, God with us, cannot sprout, cannot stretch us to become one of God’s saints, which always requires some suffering.

Why would this teenage Mary accept a pregnancy that she knew could be scandalous? That could separate her from her family and fiancé? It is interesting that none of her immediate family is ever mentioned in Scripture. Only her cousin, Elizabeth, who has taken on a similarly challenging pregnancy, welcomes Mary during her scandalous pregnancy. What happened to her family? Was Mary embraced and supported by them? Are shunned?

Her fiancé, Joseph, is also forced to take on great risks if he is going to nurture and support this pregnancy and the birth of this child. But he accepts the challenge.

When God plants a God-seed in our hearts and lives, it is equally challenging and scary and unpredictable. How did I end up here in this place called Rec, with all of you? Bizarre! Many strange twists and scary turns. And some sacrifice and suffering. And it would not have happened without the faithfulness and willingness of my wife, to accept and nurture the God-seed planted in our lives together, even if it meant giving up security and comfort and stability, and taking on great risks that could have huge impacts on our family. And the challenges never end.

Perhaps there were some easy or more stable years as Mary raised the infant Jesus. It seems Joseph had some success as a carpenter. But imagine Jesus as a teenager, and young adult, as he began to mature into his call, and begins to emerge as a radical, out of the box, prophet and leader of a very different kind of movement. Imagine the fear and anxiety that tried to overwhelm his mother, as her son began to challenge the established rulers and religious leaders.

How did Mary endure all of that? Did she see what was coming? And then, what she probably feared most, happens. Jesus is arrested, beaten, condemned, crucified. Mary

was one of the few willing to sit at the foot of the cross and endure and absorb Jesus' suffering and death.

Many of us have or will suffer greatly because of our children; choices they made; or random illnesses or catastrophes. And yet for most of us, despite all the challenges and suffering, the greatest blessings of our lives are our children, and the gift of being their parents.

Although there were difficult times and probably even moments when Mary questioned the decisions she made as a teenager, I am sure, at the end of her life, Mary never regretted her decision to accept and take on the God-seed that radically transformed and blessed her life journey, and changed the world.

“Surely from now on, all generations will call me blessed.”

Although at times, this is a most difficult and challenging job, to be your priest, pastor and rector, I have never regretted allowing the seed that led me to Reconciliation to be planted and nurtured in my heart.

This metaphor of God-seed or Emmanuel-seed being planted in the womb of our hearts is not about a one-time experience. It is something that happens over and over. God is constantly seeking to plant Holy seeds in our lives. God is constantly calling and urging and nurturing us to bear “good fruit” for the sake of God’s Kingdom. And it’s not just about us. It’s about us being a source of blessing for others.

What seed or seeds has God planted or is trying to plant in your heart, right now? Are you willing to accept and nurture these new God-seeds, even if you don’t know where they might lead you or what you might have to sacrifice to nurture them?

In these closing days of Advent, as we prepare for Christmas, here is a challenge: Is this Christmas season just a time to gather with family and friends and joyously remember the Mary and Joseph and Jesus stories? Or is it also a time to open our hearts and lives to experience the Mary and Joseph and Jesus stories, to remember that God is always striving to plant Holy-seeds in our own hearts, so that we can, like Mary, become pregnant with Christ, with Emmanuel, God with us, and bear good fruit for the sake of our family and friends and our neighbors, for the sake of God’s Kingdom? Amen.