

Sermons at the Anglican Church of Luxembourg

Preached by Rev. Geoff Read on Sunday 23rd December 2018

Text: Luke 1:39-55

“In those days ...”

That’s how our gospel reading begins

Not any old days, but specific, momentous ones

Its Part 2 of the story of Mary

And Part 1 began like this: READ 1:27-27

Very specific in terms of the time, place and the cast

At the heart of Part 1 is a short word: How

As the angel tells Mary her vocation she is “much perplexed” but her simple response is: “How can this be...”

What did Mary mean when she asked “how”?

There is a questioning, doubting “how”

Or a trusting, wondering “how”

One is “how” of doubt

The other is a “how” of faith

The How of doubt asks: “How can God do anything here?”

But the How of faith says: “God will do something here, and I wonder how?”

I think Mary’s answer is the second sort: How can this be, since I am a virgin?

That answer grows into: Here I am, the servant of the Lord: let it be with according to your word

And then it turns into action, to go and see what God is already doing in the life of her cousin Elizabeth of whom the angel has said : READ 1:36-37

Mary’s answer is not an answer of blind faith. Just like the child that is promised to grow in her, her faith grows, is progressive. And at some point what has been promised becomes fulfilled in

her as the divine seed is sown and a baby begins to grow

Our Bible reading this week follows on from Part 1

It is about Elizabeth, Mary's cousin

She is an older woman who up to then hasn't been able to have a baby

When God told her husband Zechariah that this would change, do you know what Zechariah said: How can I be sure of this. I am an old man and my wife is well on in years

Wrong "How", Zechariah!

But God stayed true to his promise – Elizabeth is now 6 months pregnant.

If "How" was the important word of Part 1, the one for Part 2 is the word "Blessed." It comes up 3 times in a very short reading!

READ: Lk 1:39-45

- Blessed are you among women
- Blessed is the fruit of your womb
- Blessed is she who believed that there would be fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord

We have one word for Happy but the original grk it is two, but very similar, both meaning happy, fortunate, made happy by God

And importantly one, *makarios*, is the same word Jesus used when he was a man and started preaching

Q: He went up onto a mountain side and said: ...?

Blessed are the poor in spirit..

He talked about the upside-down Kingdom of God where the poor are great, hungry get fed, sad are comforted

And not because their outside life changes

But because on the inside something wonderful happens – they know themselves loved, made special, blessed by God

And all that lay ahead for Mary was just like this

The cold stares and pointing fingers of others – an unmarried woman expecting a baby: nothing changed that, she had to go through it

Her fiancée nearly saying “No” and breaking off the engagement; a long hard journey, no room at the inn

She still had to go through those things too

The Christian faith isn't a divine insurance policy against bad or sad things happening in our lives

It is the promise that this Jesus who we wait for will be true to one of His many titles – Emmanuel, God with us

As Mary finally began to carry the baby Jesus literally with her, so too, filled with the Holy Spirit, she was able to experience in the midst of those things: *makarios*, blessed, made deep down happy by God