

Third Sunday of Advent

December 17, 2017

The Magnificat (Song of Mary) Luke 1:45-55

John 1:6-8, 19-28

St. John's Episcopal Church

The Rev. Kara Wagner Sherer

Today we are baptizing Henrietta Lynn. She is being baptized on the day we remember that hundreds of people, including Jesus, were flocking to the Jordan river to be baptized. It was hot and dry in Judea, and the political climate was hot too – the people were ruled by an authoritarian, oppressive power. Yet the elite Jews, the religious and political establishment, lived with a sense of **entitlement** as they got richer and more powerful and the poor struggled and suffered. They all knew something had to change, and they went to John to become that change.

It is cold and maybe snowy on this Third Sunday of Advent, and our political climate is cold and unfeeling, the latest icy wind of authoritarian, oppressive power is a list of **seven** words the current administration has banned from official statements from the Center for Disease Control. Religious faith is being manipulated to support whatever political view is expedient.

Today as we baptize Henrietta Lynn into the life and death of Jesus Christ, we hear from the other person who prepared the way for Jesus' life and ministry, his mother Mary, singing the Magnificat, which we just read together. When Jesus was just a vulnerable **fetus** Mary sang the most rebellious, triumphant, glorious song, proclaiming that, despite our beliefs and actions to the contrary, God is in control. And Mary, an unwed pregnant young woman in a culture where woman were property, is the **evidence** to prove it. She made it possible for us to sing the Song of Henrietta.

It goes like this...

Henrietta, your soul is what we lift up and honor today. We recognize that though you are a tiny baby, you are a full human being, equally important and as valuable as any other person in the world, and not more so.

Your parents' choice to hold you up before God magnifies, makes visible, the power and love of God.

Baptizing you makes our spirits rejoice, remembering how we too, have been redeemed, forgiven, and restored by God. You remind us that we have made a promise and a commitment to live holy lives.

For God takes our **vulnerabilities** and makes them strengths.

Henrietta, before you were born God chose you, loved you, and blessed you with gifts. The drops of water on your forehead, the oil, and the candle don't make you real, this sacrament makes you true, truly a child of God.

Your parents and grandparents were faithful Christians before you and offer you, knowing that you are unique, adding to the abundant **diversity** of the family of God. They trust that you also will be a blessing, in your own way, for generations to come.

Because God loves the vulnerable, and has always sided with the poor.

God's strength comes not from violence or revenge or power, but from mercy, forgiveness and love.

God pops the balloons of our self-importance, and all that the world considers important, power, fame, riches, and glory, bursts and scatters when the Holy Spirit breathes on us.

God brings down the powerful, when those who have been wronged speak the truth, and we listen, and the lies of abusers are revealed.

God fills the food deserts and the food swamps with good things, and the entitled are turned away, profitless. Despite our efforts to ignore the **science-based** evidence of climate change, God will show us how to care for this gift of creation.

This church is filled with souls, living and dead, men, women, **transgender** folks, gay, straight, and non-binary, of all colors and cultures, who have known the help of God, who come weekly to remember God's mercy, and the promise God has made to us and to you, Henrietta, to love and cherish you forever and ever.

Today I will baptize you with water, but there is a power, already working in you, which can do infinitely more than we could ask or imagine. Glory to God from generation to generation, and now at work in Henrietta, the spirit which cannot be contained or controlled, and cannot be kept from turning this world upside down.