**Sermon Fourth Sunday of Advent 19th December 2021**

**Micah 5:2-5a, Song of Mary (APBA p 425), Hebrews 10:5-10, Luke 1:39-45 (46-55)**

In our Advent study this year, we read Paula Gooder’s book ‘Journey to the Manger’ on exploring the birth of Jesus. One of the most intriguing things about Luke’s gospel is the introduction of several songs or canticles. These include the Benedictus, Zecharius’ song (Lk 1:68-79), the Gloria, the angel’s song from Lk 2:14, the Nunc Dimittis or Simeon’s song from Lk 2:29-32 and finally Mary’s song or Magnificat from Lk 1:46-55 all of which we find in the Daily Office in A Prayer Book for Australia and the Book of Common Prayer. All four in form and content are written and composed on the pattern of ‘hymns of praise’ which are similar to those found in Israel’s Psalter, or as we know them, the Psalms.

These ancient hymns are traditionally sung or read at this time of year. I’m not sure if you have noticed but many of the Psalms have been replaced with these canticles, and so we heard Mary’s Song or Magnificat today in place of a psalm reading.

What I find interesting and worth noting is these songs, these canticles follow a similar structure. Mary’s song begins with her rejoicing that she has the privilege of giving birth to the promised Messiah (Lk 1:46-48). She then glorifies God for his power, holiness and mercy (Lk 1:49-50). Mary then looks forward to God transforming the world through the Messiah. The proud will be brought low, the humble will be lifted up; the hungry will be fed, and the rich will go without (Lk 1:51-53). Finally Mary exalts God because the Lord has been faithful to his promise to Abraham, a clear reference to Genesis 12 verses 1-3 (Lk 1:54-55). It is also the pattern we see in many of the Psalms.

The Magnificat also draws heavily from other Old Testament scriptures, as said earlier, in particular the Psalms. Mary’s song begins ‘My soul magnifies the Lord’ which resonates with Psalm 103:1, ‘Bless the Lord Oh my soul and all that is within me’. But there is also another song in Scripture that resonates strongly with Mary’s song. In 1 Samuel 2:1-10, the Song of Hannah.

The similarities are striking. The two songs of Hannah and of Mary parallel one another. 1st Samuel and Luke both focus on the birth of a male child who is born to serve God. 1st Samuel not only records the birth of Samuel but goes on to tell the story of how God raised up three men to serve God and to lead Israel, Samuel, Saul and David. In the Gospel of Luke, we not only have the birth of Jesus, the story of Jesus life and ministry unfold. It is the story of how God raised up Jesus to be the Messiah.

Both are women and in both 1st Samuel and Luke, they are referred to in relation to their status as mothers. Their roles were to raise up for God, children who would follow after God and in so doing participate in God’s plan of salvation.

Hannah could be described as a type, a foreshadow, or even a whisper of Mary. Hannah is one of many women throughout scripture who exemplify the heart and actions of Mary. Hannah is one of those women, and a closer look at the two accounts we see many parellels. (I have attached for you a side by side of Hannah’s song and Mary’s)

Both had miraculous conceptions. Hannah was unable to bear children because the Lord had closed her womb (1 Sam 1:5-6). Mary on the other hand was a virgin who had never laid with a man (Lk 1:27, 34). They were both willing to serve God. Hannah vowed to the Lord that if given a child she would dedicate his life to God (1 Sam 1:11), Mary humbly gave herself to God as ‘the maidservant of the Lord’ (Lk 1:38). Both women are have a special encounter, Hannah with Eli (1 Sam1:17) and Mary with the Angel Gabriel (Lk 1:35). The message given to them was a promise to overcome fear. Eli message allowed Hannah to no longer be distressed or sad (1 Sam 1:18b), and the Angel commanded Mary not to fear (Lk1:23, 30). What God promises Hannah and Mary comes to pass, they both bear sons. Hannah named her son Samuel meaning ‘God hears’ (1 Sam 1:19, 20) and Mary is told to name the child Jesus which translates as ‘God saves’ or ‘The Lord is Salvation’ (Lk 1:31-33).

Both these women respond to God’s calling and in answer sing a song of Praise to God. The two songs are so similar, some scholars suggest that Mary may well have known Hannah’s song, singing from her heart what she had remembered from Scripture. We don’t know for sure but the two are very similar. It may be that Luke drew from the scriptures to bring Mary’s song as one of note in the story of the coming of Jesus.

For us today, Mary’s Magnificat is a reminder that the offering of praise to God is something that the people of God do. We see this through Hannah’s song, throughout the Psalms, through the canticles recorded by Luke, in particular the Magnificat. Our praise of God can also bring about change in our lives. Mary speaks of God scattering the proud, of humbling rulers, of exalting the humble, filling the hungry with food, and sending the rich away empty handed. It is a reminder to us that God comes to save his people through Jesus. The gospel is a game changer. The gospel often does not sit well with the status quo. The world encourages people to seek for wealth, for status, for power. Jesus instead was born to a poor family, in a humble place. Poor shepherds are their first visitors. God chooses the humble of this world to bring glory to God. Jesus who is born of Mary comes to all those who need blessing, mercy, and the grace of God in their life. Mary as a young girl, no more than 12 is chosen by God to bear in her body the Lord Jesus Christ and she does so willingly. It is within this context that Mary sings her song of praise to God. May we today, give thanks to God for Mary’s yes, for Mary’s song of praise as an example of life and living.

Amen.

