

Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church
First Sunday after Christmas
12/29/2024
Luann Yutzy

Cradling Hope

I'm sorry to not have been with you and thanks to Megan for reading this reflection! Our Christmas is going a little differently than we hoped for!

Have you ever imagined Mary at the end of her life looking back over the years? I wonder if she would have been full of despair and disillusionment thinking of how her son was rejected. Did she remember all too well the young girl who was told in the middle of the night that she would carry the son of God? Was she able to hold on to hope all of her life?

It was a tall order to be given this Divine mission of carrying the Redeemer to a young couple, a teenage girl who didn't have time to prepare. We find them now in the text we heard today, a young and weary Mary and Joseph at the temple in the first 40 days of their baby's life, trying to find a way to meet the social expectations of the church of dedication and sacrifice. They are poor. They can only afford two turtle doves. They've traveled a lot in past days from Nazareth to Jerusalem to Bethlehem and back to Jerusalem with an infant. I imagine they need more sleep.

God picked two people struggling to make ends meet, entrusting them with the Savior of the world, to shape him and mold him in his spiritual formation. God must have known Mary and Joseph in their poverty, would have what he wanted his Son to learn and in their Temple Community his son would gain wisdom from many ages and supportive hands.

Who says people who aren't prosperous aren't blessed?

Yet, a sword would pierce her mother's heart, Simeon said, as he blessed Jesus and held him in his arms. Mary's hopes and dreams, had she had time to hope and dream yet? It all happened so fast, this huge change in her life. And now she heard the heaviness of who her son was and what he would offer the whole world.

It sounded dangerous and vulnerable to be a message of deliverance and hope for the Gentiles too. How would that happen?

Simeon could now rest in peace having seen the Messiah and he cradled hope in his arms at last. At last, the Messiah had come.

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The blessing of Anna, the wise prophetess, laid a foundation for the baby Jesus, the Son of God. Her blessing of thanksgiving and praise for his life is what faith communities are to be. We support and help raise the children around us and help them to be who they are created to be.

We make space for their questions and their imaginative minds, giving them room to grow into the faith they will embrace as their own. And most of all, they and their parents will know they have a bigger family to help catch them when they fall and walk them a ways down the road as they steady themselves.

We will help to let the fingers open up to let the children go and have their own experiences and relationships, praying that God will find them in ways they will recognize.

We, as a church, hold the fears and hopes of the next generation. We need to show them we are fully alive and we are here for them. Children are the church now, not some distant time. Their child-like spirituality can encourage us all.

We all have time where we begin and take our first breath. We have no idea what lies before us; the children who will be ours if we have any, who our companions will be and closest friends, the adventures we will have, the failures and disappointments, the hellos and the goodbyes.

What will we be most grateful for when we stand like Mother Mary must have at the end of her life, reflecting on the life of her Son, who died way too young?

Did she wish she had said no to the angel Gabriel?

Had she felt carried by the Spirit of God all her life, knowing she was blessed even though the blessing was not in material means?

Blessed are the poor for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

What about us? Will we learn to hold the losses we have known so they become a bright sadness that is a warmth for others who are walking a rough road?

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Will we have wished we would have been more vulnerable and shared more deeply with people so we could lean on each other more?

As we look back over our year of 2024, we may see where someone upheld us and offered us a hand. We may see where someone said encouraging words. Give thanks for them again. Those are blessings in our life we cannot take for granted.

And now, who do we want to be in 2025? Will we be the people who bless? Will we offer the Mary and Joseph's struggling to make ends meet more than words of blessing? We can do more than that.

Will we be the followers of Jesus who love the people on the edges like Jesus was?

We have a new year ahead and a past year to reflect on.

And they named him Jesus, the One who held our hopes and fears and was a light to the world.

The first response song will be *Today Earth Is Singing* VT 510 and in the 3rd line of, "we greet you, dear ____, I invite you to sing a child's name out loud as we sing this song of blessing together.