

The Reverend Marjo Anderson

**M: Christmas Eve
Luke 2:1-20**

**24 December 2021
Salem, Bridgeport**

“A Bumpy Journey”

Mary clung to the donkey’s neck, her back aching, & her head hurting from sheer exhaustion. It was the 10th day of their trip and as she bumped along uncomfortable on the donkey’s back, she thought of how this bumpy journey to Bethlehem mirrored the bumpy journey of the last 8-1/2 months.

Up and down went her very pregnant body with every step of the donkey.

Up and down they went over mountains and valleys and hills and plains.

And up and down had certainly been the way of her body and mind and heart and spirit these many months.

First there had been that mountain top experience of the angel’s visit to her with that incredible promise –

to her, ordinary, average, no body special Mary!

God would give her a child who would grow up to be the long-awaited Messiah! She had been on top of the world!

Until she had realized her predicament. She was pregnant! How would she tell Joseph? What would he do?

If he didn’t believe her story about the angel, he would think her an adulteress,

and not only would she lose him, she could very well lose her life.

She could be stoned to death, and both she and her unborn child would die.

But before she could work up the courage to tell him, a messenger had arrived with a message – her elderly cousin was pregnant and needed her right away!

With his customary care, Joseph had spent the next week

making arrangements for her to join a caravan to make the 7-10 day trip.

And Mary thanked God for this opportunity to figure out with Elizabeth how to tell Joseph.

The trip was arduous and dangerous, but she had arrived safely

and Elizabeth had not only greeted her warmly, but with perfect understanding of her situation.

And Mary thanked God for this confirmation of God’s promise and faithfulness.

Then had come the morning sickness which had rolled over her like waves, just like fear and doubt continued to roll in.

But every time it did, there was Elizabeth to offer her encouragement and hope

And Mary thanked God for the support & love she received from Elizabeth’s faith & joy.

After the 3 months of sickness had passed, Elizabeth had told her it was time to make the journey home.

She had to tell Joseph.

It was terrifying, but her time with Elizabeth had given her courage & so when she finally got home she told him the truth.

But he didn't believe her.

She could hear the hurt and humiliation underneath his anger as he stomped out of her house, slamming the door.

With sobs bursting from her throat and tears flowing down her cheeks,

she fled outside to the garden and sat amidst the olive trees,

praying all night to the God who had promised her so much and yet had allowed this to happen!

And then the next day, Joseph had found her still in the garden, and told her about his visit from an angel!

And Mary had again thanked God for intervening with Joseph on her behalf!

They had moved up the marriage, but neither one of them could figure out

how they would explain a full-sized baby arriving 3 months early!

And then had come the news, the emperor was requiring them to go to Bethlehem!

They could travel on their own, stay until the baby arrived and none of their relatives or friends would have to know

exactly when the baby was born!

And Mary thanked God once again for this time to make everything work.

So many ups and down. So many mountains and valleys.

So many promises, so many doubts, so many confirmations, so many thanksgivings.

“Mary.” “Mary?” “Mary!”

She realized Joseph was speaking. “Yes, my love?”

“Look! We're almost there! You can see Bethlehem – right over there!!

And at that moment, she felt the warm liquid flow down her leg. Her water had broken!

It was good they were here, because it was time – time for God's promise to her to be fulfilled!

And Mary once again thanked God!

John, in his gospel, only tells us that the Word of God came to dwell with us.

Mark, in his, only tells us that God sent the Son in the form of a man named Jesus.

If you read Matthew, you'll hear about Joseph's dream,

but absolutely nothing about Mary

except the fact that she was Joseph's wife and Jesus' mother.

But Luke goes out of his way to tell us this story of Mary.

And that story is what makes the story of Christmas relevant to you and me –

because it makes it our story.

Because, you see, God comes to each one of us at some point in our life

with the invitation to let God be born in us.

If we have the faith to believe that we have received that invitation,

and if we have courage to say yes to that invitation,
then we will undergo a life-changing moment, a mountaintop experience –
the equivalent of Abraham’s vision of a starry sky promising descendants,
or Jacob’s wrestling a blessing out of angel, or Joseph’s dreams of greatness,
or Moses’ burning bush, or Mary’s visit by the angel.

God comes to us with an invitation to live in us and be born in us
and in the moment we say “yes”
we know a love and joy and peace and hope surpassing anything we have ever known.
And yet as momentous and miraculous as that moment is,
it’s just the beginning of what will certainly be a bumpy journey,
beset by fears and frustrations, by doubts and despair, by obstacles and obstructions.
As challenging as our journey is, however, we do not travel it alone,
for God is always there beside us, with messages of confirmation of his promise to us.

I know what God has promised me,
and every time I have doubted, God has sent a confirmation of that promise.
God has sent so many confirmations, in fact, that I have no reason to doubt.
And yet, doubt I do,
because when things seem to be going in the exact opposite direction from the promise,
it is not always easy to hold on to faith.

That’s why Luke gives us this gift of Mary’s story –
to remind us that God is guiding our journey from mountain to valley to hill to plain.
God met Mary in her fear and doubt and sickness and grief
with gifts of grace, envoys of encouragement, and harbingers of hope.
And today Mary’s message is this:
The journey will be bumpy,
but whatever your fear and doubt, your sorrow and pain, your grief and mourning,
God will meet you with signs and wonders and visions and miracles
that bring peace to your body, hope to your mind, love to your heart, & joy to your spirit.

As Christ was born of Mary, may that same Christ be born in your heart this Christmas! **Amen**