**Sunday December 19th, 2021**

**Advent IV**

**Luke 1: 39-45**

 The reading from the prophet Micah tells of a ruler who is to come…the one who will restore peace to the world. And the one to come will come out of an unlikely place…Bethlehem. Micah died approximately 670 years before the birth of Jesus. Every person who would have heard the words would have hoped that this would truly be the Messiah…the one to be sent from God to set them free. The words from Micah set the tone for this fourth Sunday, when we light the candle of love. Micah opens up the family history for the story that Mary brings to the world in the human baby, the promised and long anticipated Saviour.

 In the gospel just prior to where we began today, God has sent the angel Gabriel to tell Mary she has found favour with God…that she has been chosen to bear the son of the Highest. No doubt she asked ‘why me’? She has no real idea what her part will be as yet. A bit on the confused side, she asks how that can be, yet she answers “I am the Lord’s servant…may your word to me be fulfilled.” (NIV, Luke 1: 26-45) In today’s gospel, Mary has just said ‘yes’ to participating in God’s plan, with all the awe and uncertainty that brings. She reacts as many of us would…she turns to a close family member for support.

 Mary’s response to God’s invitation comes from a woman who must have been a force to reckon with in her own right. Mary’s response comes out of a deep conviction and trust in God. She must have been determined and strong, knowing that her ‘yes’ was going to take her in a direction that would be challenging to navigate, as she followed God’s vision. When Mary arrives at her cousin Elizabeth’s, there is immediate recognition in the responses of Elizabeth and her unborn child, as they responded to Mary’s pregnancy and what was to come. Elizabeth confirms what Mary already knows in her heart, “Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!” (NIV Luke 1: 45)

 Beginning with the visit of Gabriel to Mary, the love story that begins with the conception and birth as a human baby sent to live among us enfolds for every generation that follows. God has come to us through the incarnation*,* the promise shared with generations of people through the prophets and hoped for by those same, ordinary people. God’s love has held us together through millennia, working through the relationships we have with God and one another. It’s that love that gives rise to the opportunities that can and will remake our world. It begins with a young woman, willing to trust in God’s promises and vision for humankind. It grows though the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus, the one whom God sends. And it awaits its conclusion, as we await Jesus’ return.

 Christ’s coming at Christmas, in the form of a helpless, human child, changes everything for humanity. God came into our midst, travelled the same human path we travel today, and continues to bring hope, healing and love. The love that comes from God empowers ordinary people like you and me to participate in bringing change to a challenged world.

 Christian faith is built on the relationships we have with God, Jesus, one another, ourselves and the rest of the world. The love that connects us allows each of us to shine God’s light against the shadows of hate, injustice, racism and marginalization. That love is a force to be reckoned with.

 May the love we share in faith this week shine brightly and sustain us, as we finish our final preparations to celebrate the birth of Christ. AMEN