

*Advent 4C 2015*  
*A Tale of Two Women*

Today the church turns our attention to two women who are waiting for the birth of their children. The first, Elizabeth, is far beyond the normal age for bearing children. The second, Mary, is still a young virgin.

But something marvelous has happened in the lives of these women. Elizabeth and her husband Zechariah had devoutly observed God's law, but God had not blessed them with children. But now, in their old age, when there was no hope for having children, Elizabeth is pregnant with new life through the power of God. She will be the mother of the greatest of the prophets; she will be the mother of John the Baptist.

Mary is still a young girl, a virgin; and although she is engaged to Joseph, they have not yet come together. But now, through of the power of God's Holy Spirit, she is filled with new life. She is to be the mother of the Messiah, the Son of God.

The story of these two women points to the power of God's salvation. Both women remind us that salvation is God's gracious gift. It is not something we can earn or bring about by our power. It is the free gift of a gracious God. It is the unexpected gift of a merciful God who seeks to save us.

Consider Elizabeth. She was too old to be filled with new life, and there was nothing she could do. She was too old to give birth, and there was nothing she could do. But what Elizabeth could not do, God did for her. What Elizabeth could not bring about, God accomplished. And so in her old age, Elizabeth gave birth to John the Baptist.

Consider Mary. She was a young virgin with no experience of carnal relations, but she now finds herself pregnant with the very Son of God. God brings about what is humanly impossible. God's Son is born of a virgin.

So many things seem impossible in our lives. How is it possible, we ask, to have peace in our time. How is possible, we ask, to end the violence and hatred that surround us. How is it possible, we ask, to change our lives so that we can overcome the failure and sin that beset us. How is it possible, we ask, for the dead to rise to new life. Humanly speaking, all these things are impossible for us because we cannot save ourselves no matter what we do. But with God all things are possible.

Only God can save and redeem us. Only God can give us new life. Only God can do what we cannot do. This is the message of God's Word this final Sunday of Advent. This is the lesson we learn from these two women. Mary and Elizabeth point to the salvation that only God can bring about. They remind us that Christmas is a gracious offer of salvation.

As we begin this final week of Advent and wait for the Lord to come into our lives, we ask for the grace that only God can give. We wait for the salvation that only God can give.