

Good Morning Church and good morning to you Lord.

For me, writing a sermon is a process of collection. The first thing that I do is consider the gospel text and ask myself questions about what it means to me and what are the questions that come to my mind as I consider its personal relevance. Then I begin to look at what others have to say about the readings and I read the collect appointed for the week. The collect brings together in a succinct prayer the theme of the lessons for the week. By the time I begin to write, I have might have read the text one or multiple times depending on how familiar I am with the reading. At any point in this process the Holy Spirit may interject an opinion or idea. That is where it can get tricky. When the Holy Spirit shows up. Because just when I think I know what I need to say, the Spirit puts something in my heart or even on my page that is off plan. That is what happened this week. So I am going to go off lectionary for part of my sermon. Early this week when I was reading some sources for this weeks reading I made some notes about Psalm 86: 11-13. When it came time to write and I was going through all the notes I made I was surprised to find notes on Psalm 86 because it is not the appointed psalm for today. I searched all my usual sites and sources and could not find where I read anything about psalm 86. So the only thing to do is to preach it. The best thing about this spirit gift is that it

takes me right where I felt led to go to preach the Gospel. I don't know why I continue to be surprised when God does God's job. It sure makes it fun.

Psalm 86:11-13

Teach me your way, O LORD,  
and I will walk in your truth; \*  
knit my heart to you that I may fear your Name.

12 I will thank you, O LORD my God, with all my heart, \*  
and glorify your Name for evermore.

13 For great is your love toward me; \*  
you have delivered me from the nethermost Pit.

So, the psalmist asks for God to knit his heart to God. That there would be no division between the desires of his heart and the Lord's desires for him. That is quite a prayer. At least for me I can hardly imagine considering God's desire in everything that I do. There are so many ways that I go about life without considering God. It seems the busier I get, the more I rely on my own judgment without asking for input, without prayer. This is a profound thought for me as I consider the Gospel for today. The story of Mary's call to be the God bearer, theotokos is one that I cannot begin to imagine. It is impossible for me to even pretend to put myself in Mary's place because I know the rest of the story. We know what happens to Mary's baby boy. But Mary does not have a clue. Some people want to know more about the details of Mary's story...how did she tell her parents, what did she say to Joseph, her friends. Was she afraid? Of course she was. I don't really think it is important to know more than Mary is the icon

for how one has a heart knit together with God's, an undivided heart for God. It is in her answer to her calling that we learn what it means to be a disciple. It is not the details of the world that inform our relationship with God. It is the desire of God's own heart that informs our relationship with him. Note that Mary's obedience was not instant. It isn't like we are able to get our hearts in sync with God's and that is it. Mary's story illustrates that it is in relationship with God and by considering what God is asking us to do that we are able to steer ourselves into a holy union with our Lord.

Mary embodies the entire reality of Christmas.

How does she do this?

First, Mary does not ask for this, she is favored, blessed. We are all blessed by God. We tend to forget that don't we? Focusing on all the ways that we are not perfect and forgetting how lovely we are in God's eyes. We are so blessed, so loved that God sent us his son.

Second, Mary is perplexed. Well to me that feels like the understatement of the millennium. But perplexity is the perfect word to describe how I feel when the Lord shows up. But wait a minute. God is always here. The gift of Jesus is constant, eternal.

Third, Mary asks, "how can this be?" How can it be that God would love us so much that he would send Jesus. To be human, to be vulnerable, to be Emmanuel, God with us.

Fourth, Mary makes the commitment. "Here am I." She accepts God's call as did the prophets. She opens herself up to re-imagining her relationship with God and who she is. She opens herself up to the future of possibility. Through Christ all things are possible.

Are we willing to declare that we are blessed? That we are highly favored? Are we willing to knit our hearts to God and move beyond confusion and perplexity and even objection to accept the call of discipleship? Are we willing to say 'Here I am Lord. Send me?' And then to accept the calling that God has for us not the call that we want God to have for us. I doubt that if Mary was saying her prayers and wondering what she could do for God that it would be to become an unwed mother of the Lord's own son, to birth him in a stable, and then watch him die on the cross. Yet, she was blessed. And you are blessed. Mary is the example of what might happen when you accept God's blessing.

In that silent, holy night Jesus came to face off against sin, death and evil. When we hail the babe, the son of Mary we need to remember not just the glow of the

nativity but the reality that is so well stated in a verse of the hymn "what child is this.'

Nails, spear shall pierce him through,  
The cross he borne for me, for you;  
Hail, hail the word made flesh,  
The babe, the son of Mary!

Because, see we know the rest of the story.