

# Fourth Sunday after Advent , Gospel Year C

## God's Ambitions Are Greater than Ours

Luke 1:39-45 [46-55]

Fourth Sunday after Advent

Analysis by Peter Keyel

*39 In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, 40 where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit 42 and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. 43 And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? 44 For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. 45 And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."*

*46 And Mary said,  
"My soul magnifies the Lord,  
47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
48 for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.  
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;  
49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.  
50 His mercy is for those who fear him  
from generation to generation.  
51 He has shown strength with his arm;  
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.  
52 He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,  
and lifted up the lowly;*

53 *he has filled the hungry with good things,  
and sent the rich away empty.*  
54 *He has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,*  
55 *according to the promise he made to our ancestors,  
to Abraham and to his descendants forever."*



*Jesus will fill the hungry, both with food and forgiveness of sins. This will be revealed most clearly when Jesus empties himself for us in his death on the cross. God's commitment to filling people with mercy is seen in Jesus' resurrection.*

## **DIAGNOSIS: God Wrecks Our Ambitions**

### ***Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Bringing Down the Powerful***

Bringing down the powerful? Isn't this supposed to be diagnosing a problem, not providing the solution to most of our ills?

At first glance, it seems that the powerful are the problem, and removing them the solution. However, "The powerful" are always

those people who have more than us. More fame, more reach, more ability to set policy. With one or two exceptions, we rarely see ourselves as “the powerful.”

And yet... the comparison we rarely make is to the “less fortunate” (note we don’t call them weaker). Objectively, we are more powerful than many people around us, or elsewhere. Mary is only talking about people more powerful than us, right? It couldn’t be about us?

### ***Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Proud Thoughts in Our Hearts***

If we think more about it, we are better than others. We have more power. We’re not supposed to feel better than others, so we can identify this as misguided thinking. But if we avoid thinking about it, it still doesn’t change reality, as much as we may wish it would.

That leaves us with two options. We can embrace the proud thoughts in our hearts. Yes, we are better, what of it? Problem is that these are clearly proud thoughts. At least we’re honest, but that doesn’t change the problem.

Alternatively, we can run down the spiral of victimhood and try to “prove” to ourselves and others that we’re weak and not powerful, or that the ‘more powerful’ is always some other group. In the dialectic, we’re either oppressors or oppressed, and Mary has already told us what happens to oppressors. The problem with this approach is the thoughts are still proud thoughts. We’re still trying to prove our worthiness, just measuring with a different scale.

### ***Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Empty***

All of these routes reveal that we are busy in the quest to

justify ourselves before God. Either we are better because we deserve God's favor, or we follow the right forms and adequately prostrate ourselves to prove we deserve it. Both are consequences of being rich. And Mary's praise is that God sends the rich away empty.

Tearing down the powerful means tearing us down. And the tearing down ends up being a lot more than just metaphorical, especially since God is the one doing it. When we try to justify ourselves before God, we will be sent away empty.



## **PROGNOSIS: God's Promise Is Greater than Our Ambitions**

### ***Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Filled***

God is not content with tearing down the powerful. God is building something different and new, which stretches back to the promise made to Abraham. God has given Mary a child, who will be Jesus. Jesus will fill the hungry, both with food and forgiveness of sins. This will be revealed most clearly when Jesus empties himself for us in his death on the cross. God's commitment to filling people with mercy is seen in Jesus' resurrection.

### ***Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Lowliness of Servants***

Being filled with mercy leads to an abandonment of all our

pursuits of power and pride. When Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit, her reaction is amazement and gratitude. Faith abandons the need for justification. It is not a race to be the most lowly of servants, but an understanding that we are absolutely dependent on God's grace. It is trust that God has the justification problem handled. We can face hard questions as we need to without having to prove ourselves.

***Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Lifted Up***

The result of this faith is that God lifts us up. We are freed to magnify the LORD through our works. We can praise God for what has been done and what God is continuing to do in our lives. The powerful will fall, and that may include us, but our trust in God to see us through these challenges allows us to pass God's mercy through the generations.