

Children’s Moment

Good morning, girls and boys. I’m so glad you made time to be with us today. Esperanza and I pray for you.

Today, I want to talk about babies. Every one of you and every one of us, even your parents and grandparents, were babies at one time. Your parents probably showed you a picture from when you were a baby. My parents did. Some of them are pretty embarrassing.

Some of you don’t have brothers or sisters. Some of you do. For those of you who are older, do you remember what it was like when your parents brought the new baby home?

Things turned upside down. All of a sudden, the baby became the center of attention. The baby needed to be fed, bathed and changed. You had to be quiet when the baby was sleeping. And your parents spent a lot more time with the baby, taking him or her for walks, playing with her or him, and more.

What did that mean for you? You may have felt a little left out. When we’re kids, we want to help, but some things are a little too difficult for us. Things were challenging, but there was a lot of joy and hope, too.

What can you do? You can be like Mary and have courage. Even though things are difficult, they will work out because God is working to help us. That’s why we have faith. We trust God.

When Jesus was born as a baby, he changed Mary and Joseph’s lives. They had to learn how to take care of a baby during a time when things were difficult. They didn’t have a pandemic, but they had to work hard so they wouldn’t starve. They had to follow someone else’s rules. But Mary and Joseph had faith and courage. Everything turned out all right.

No matter how hard things get, you can always count on God to be there and to help. You just have to ask and then listen for God’s answer. The way we do that is by praying.

Will you pray with me?

Message: “Mary: Song of Faith”

Hurricane Irma was a category 5 storm that hit the Caribbean, Puerto Rico, Cuba and Florida in August 2017. Even during such a powerful hurricane, babies were born.

- A woman in Coral Springs gave birth to her daughter on her bathroom floor. Her mother assisted in the birth until emergency workers arrived.
- A Miami woman gave birth just hours before 125-mile-per-hour winds hit the city. She named her daughter Nayiri Storm.
- A woman in the Little Haiti neighborhood in Miami delivered her baby girl herself, with coaching assistance from emergency workers over the telephone.

Babies are born. Babies are born to rich people and poor people. Babies are born during hurricanes, tornadoes, floods and earthquakes. Babies are born in cities under siege, in refugee camps, in countries led by dictators and in democracies. Babies are born to people with black skin, brown skin, white skin, and many variations of those hues. Babies are born to single women, to married gay men; to people who are prepared, and to women who didn’t even know they were pregnant until they went into labor. Babies are born healthy and babies are born with medical challenges, diseases, deformities and disabilities. Babies are born into every conceivable condition in our complex world.

UNICEF estimates that four babies are born every second of every single day somewhere on this planet that we share.¹ Every time a baby is born, lives are changed. Individuals are changed. Families are changed. Communities are changed. Worlds are turned upside down.

I can’t help but think of Lin-Manuel Miranda’s lyrics to “The World Turned Upside Down” from the Broadway hit musical Hamilton. As Alexander Hamilton prepares to lead his men in the battle of Yorktown, he recalls his wife Eliza is not only expecting him to return home alive;

¹ <http://www.theworldcounts.com/stories/How-Many-Babies-Are-Born-Each-Day>

she's expecting a baby. All this, while Hamilton goes to fight a war that will eventually birth a new nation: the world turned upside down.

Today, we are inspired by another song. Mary's song of strength and hope is compelling. Mary's song isn't a sweet lullaby sung in anticipation of the baby Jesus' birth. It's a message of deliverance to those who have been put down, made to feel like they are less, the empty-handed, the hungry, those who have lost their ego, their pride.

Mary's song tells us hope is available in a world filled with fear. Her song continues to challenge us and bring hope to us today. Mary's song shows us what's possible. And, just like in the song from Hamilton, this song is about birth on several levels.

At one level, it's about a particular family. It's about the birth of a baby and the turning upside down of a family's life. It's about how Mary's whole world is turning. The life she thought she was going to have is gone. Mary's not married. She's in shock. She's a teenager. Mary didn't get pregnant the normal way.

And yet, she responds with joy. Mary isn't going to let anyone steal her joy. She has courage. She has strength. The joy of the Lord is Mary's strength. It's our strength as well, if we have faith like she did.

This birth is about more than one family. At another level, it's about the turning of the whole world. Through the birth of Jesus, God is turning the world around to make it livable for everybody. Through Jesus, God is making the world a place of welcome and nurture not just for some - the privileged - but for all. God makes this world our home as the Christ. It's the way God works with us.

The entire hope of God's salvation is contained in Mary's narrative. In this birth, a new order is called forth. Through the birth of Jesus, the whole world is turned around. The promised Messiah, Emmanuel, is Jesus - God with us. His birth changes the course of history.

We live in a time when everything in our world is telling us to be afraid: afraid of one another, afraid of disagreement, afraid of knowledge, afraid of nature, afraid for the future of all people on earth.

But I wonder if it’s ever been different for the majority of people on this earth. Babies are born into all different kinds of conditions in this world. Certainly, Mary wasn’t in the best situation to have a child. Yet, when confronted with the shocking news, she did what all of us must do: she reached deep into her soul and found courage that came from a place beyond her own self, beyond her own limitations and fears. She found courage that came from her absolute faith in God. As proof: Mary was willing to receive Christ, physically, into her womb.

Our question is simpler: Are you willing to receive Christ into your heart? Mary’s song is a song of faith. Mary’s song can be our song, too. We can refuse to give into the fear the world constantly screams into our lives. We can reject the notion everything is spinning out of control and embrace the reality the world is simply about to turn, just as God intends it.

You’re ready to receive Christ in your heart, mind and soul when you admit there are things about our world that need to be turned upside down for the sake of others.

Amy Sigmon narrates her story of anticipation and faith during Christmas 2013. She writes this: “I was pregnant with our first child, a baby boy, who was due about two weeks after Christmas. It felt like I was approximately one thousand weeks pregnant, though by the calendar’s reckoning it was thirty-eight. We lived in Milwaukee at the time and that winter was colder than most. I spent a lot of time on those cold days hunkered down in our 1930s-era apartment, organizing the baby’s room. When there was nothing left to organize, I baked.

I spent the season of Advent feeling almost mystically connected to Mary, the young mother of God incarnate. I gave thanks more than once that I didn’t have experiences like hers, traveling at the end of her pregnancy and having no safe place to give birth. But, without doubt, I shared some aspects of the experience of pregnancy with Mary. We’d both been captured by the same wonder, feeling our babies kick as we tried to go to sleep. We’d been awakened for the third time in the night as the babies shifted against our bladders. We’d been excited and

nervous at the same time. I wrote in my journal, ‘Baby Caleb will be here any day to turn our world upside down.’

There’s nothing like spending the season of Advent in the last weeks of pregnancy. I was nearly beside myself with the anticipation of bringing our baby into the world. Like Mary with Jesus, I had no idea when Caleb would make his arrival.”² All Amy knew was that he would arrive in a challenging and hopeful way.

We know Christ comes to us in this season of Advent. You may or may not receive him on December 25th or any other date, but that doesn’t mean God’s Spirit is absent from your life. God is always present. We are the ones who lack the courage, the faith, to open ourselves and receive the gift of grace.

I invite you to make your heart ready, to anticipate with faith the surprising way Jesus will enter your heart, mind and soul. As you do, I leave you with a question:

What waits inside your heart or soul ready to turn your world upside down?

² <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/advent-through-christmas-season-2017-series-overview/fourth-sunday-of-advent-2017-planning-notes/fourth-sunday-of-advent-2017-preaching-notes>

Instructions on how to sign up for ZOOM church on Dec. 13

There are three ways to sign up:

- Respond to RSVP you’ll get by email (or on church web site)
 Invite family and friends to participate
- Respond to email reminder
- Contact us at coronaumc@gmail.com

We are looking for people to serve as hosts during the service. It’s an easy job, we will provide training.

Luke 1:46-55 (CEB)

⁴⁶ Mary said,

“With all my heart I glorify the Lord!

⁴⁷ In the depths of who I am I rejoice in God my savior.

⁴⁸ He has looked with favor on the low status of his servant.

Look! From now on, everyone will consider me highly favored

⁴⁹ because the mighty one has done great things for me.

Holy is his name.

⁵⁰ He shows mercy to everyone,
from one generation to the next,
who honors him as God.

⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm.

He has scattered those with arrogant thoughts and proud inclinations.

⁵² He has pulled the powerful down from their thrones
and lifted up the lowly

⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away empty-handed.

⁵⁴ He has come to the aid of his servant Israel,
remembering his mercy,

⁵⁵ just as he promised to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to Abraham’s descendants forever.”