Our Advent theme has revolved around preparing for God, by preparing to be upended. Either through circumstances or by your own choosing, we break the routine. But in one way or another what we have been asked to believe is that here is where God is at work in the world upending our ordered world, and offering us something new. The hard part is that is that this change is frightening and scary. When God showed up to our characters in the Christmas story they were all either afraid, paralyzed, or terrified. They were confused, and disoriented, at least at first. But this of course is how all change is usually experienced. And so Advent preparation is learning to rethink these experiences that unsettle our way of life, that call us out of what we know and into something new. And this of course is what God offers isn’t it? Something new.

In our Gospel lesson today, Mary provides the example of learning this Advent lesson. If our other lesson offered us the teaching, todays Gospel is the example of how Advent works in real life. For her world is upended isn’t it? Absolutely upended. Her routine will never be the same. She is totally taken out of what she knows. But notice that Mary doesn’t respond the way we normally do. She isn’t all upset or irritated by the fact that her world is changing at all. She isn’t complaining that life isn’t like it used to be, that the good old days are gone. She, on the other hand, is completely overwhelmed with joy. God has intruded into her life and done his work, good grief she’s pregnant and had nothing to do with it! She is out of control and unsure about the future. But she understands that this means that God has not forgotten her, but indeed is at work in her life. She understands that her world being upended means that God is looking on her with God’s favor. And she is, rightly, blown away by it.

But there is something else in her celebration, that might strike us as a bit odd. Because God’s action is not just something that happens to her, but it is also something that happens to her society. This is a huge intervention. Because God’s activity is not just for individual people here is it, or an individual person. Luke is very clear about this. Her rejoicing is for social change. Economic change. Wealth redistribution. And what is even more interesting is that most of this is what we would associated now with the politics of the left. Bringing down the powerful, lifting up the lowly. Sending the wealthy away empty and lifting up the poor and the hungry. The battles about race and privilege that are at the heart of our deepest bitterness and divide. These are the issues, that as we speak, are tearing this country apart. Mary sounds a bit like Bernie Sanders here if you will.

This is also one of the few prophecies in the Bible from a woman, so it brings up all those issues when you read the commentaries. God is turning upside down here, challenging, the traditional power of a male dominated society. The voice that celebrates God activity in what is perhaps the most famous of all biblical prophecies, is the voice of a woman, a voice that normally would never have been heard. Oh God is intervening. We’re having fun now aren’t we? Her celebration definitely leans to the left in terms of what it is celebrating.

And then there is what is missing. There is nothing here about repentance and forgiveness here is there. Religion in our day is often understood to be about personal sin, repentance, and forgiveness. That’s it, once you repent and ask for forgiveness, you’re in, you’re saved if you believe. All the rest is window dressing. But in Mary’s prophecy about what God is up to in the birth of this Jesus, that not the focus at all. See and this is important, who does repentance and forgiveness in Luke’s Christmas story? John the Baptist. Oh Jesus does forgiveness in Luke. But Luke is much more interested in a ministry that lifts up the poor and the oppressed, than in repentance and forgiveness. This is the prophecy.

It can be controversial. Mary’s prophecy touches some uncomfortable subjects in todays polarized world. Social justice has become almost a dirty word today in many ciricles. Can’t do that if you want to understand what Jesus is about in the Gospel of Luke. God looks with favor, not on just on who Mary is as an individual, but on all people everywhere who are in her social and economic condition. That’s the prophecy, it’s for all the marginalized, and this the reality for which Mary rejoices and celebrates with great joy.

This is huge part of the Christian tradition. And there are many Christians on the left, who are working to lift up women, LGBTQ, people of color, immigrants, and environmental justice. Perhaps you have heard of God’s “preferencial option for the poor” a guiding principle for the Liberation theology of central and South America. All of these movements would place a great emphasis on Mary’s prophetic word, and these people who seek social justice for the oppressed, certainly have much Biblical support to rest on, especially in the prophets. And certainly one of the todays points needs to be that more liberal Christians have an important part to play in our understanding of Jesus.

You have to be cautious of course. I realize that left wing movements in our last century often were very ugly and turned violent. Millions of people in the last century, were slaughtered all over the world in political movements designed to “bring down the rich and powerful” and lift up the poor. And we all know how easy it is to use the Bible for our own purposes. So while Scripture certainly endorses lifting up the poor, and those without a voice, and a message that is more than forgiveness, it’s surely not my intent to endorse will nilly political social justice efforts coming from the left. That would be nieve indeed.

But certainly, the Joy of having a Savior here means something a little different than one who saves us from the bad things we did last week, or our personal wrongdoing. For Mary, God is saving her from her social position. Her society has stuck her in a box, marked unimportant. And the sin of which she is set free is the sin of which our more liberal brothers and sisters in the faith speak of today. It’s the sin of racism, sexism, of economic injustice, the way some groups of people have more power than others, or even privilege. Her joy in Lord is for these things. The sin God saves her from is not about personal sin or character, but lies in the social structures of her society.

It is odd though. Because Mary implies that it’s already done. The rich have been brought down, the poor raised up. it’s done. Accomplished. And that doesn’t make any sense does it? Because Herod is still on his throne, Rome still rules, the poor were still the poor. The proud were still the proud. The rich still have all the advantages. And in the 2000 years that have elapsed since Mary uttered these words, you could say that in a certain sense, not much has changed at all. And yet here is Mary, in the midst of a world where little had changed, proclaiming this social revolution as if it were already done. What in the world could that mean?

Hmm. I don’t know if this is going to work, but maybe we can think about it like this. Aren’t we all a little like Mary? Aren’t there powers that sort of have all of us, over a barrel so to speak? Don’t they design cars now, so it’s harder to work on them yourself? You can’t fix anything, you have to call some guy with a computer program that only the dealer has? You get set up to be at their mercy. If you buy an apple product, you have to buy their chargers, and everything is more expensive. You can’t just buy the TV show you want, you have buy all these other channels you don’t care about.

I’m a pastor. And the box people put me in is the worst part of this job. People think you are going to judge them all the time. Like you’re on some path of the straight and narrow. They think you have some special connection to God that they don’t have. That you don’t sin as much. That you’re nice all the time. That your marriage is always wonderful. Language patrol. I can’t imagine what it would be like to be policeman these days. But one way or another society or group think puts us all in these little boxes in one way or another.

Well, what if you discovered a power that could open the door? Get you out of the box? Set you free? I had just such an experience the other day. My car is about almost 4 years old now, and I haven’t done anything to it accept change the oil and air filters. And I’ve had that feeling of being over a barrel. I’m stuck. I’m going to just have to start taking it in. I just look at the engine and I go? But then something happened. It’s called Youtube. And you know what? You’re still kind of over a barrel, but there’s a YouTube video out there that will show me how to do my brakes. Change my transmission fluid. Jacking points. Coolant changes. How to undo those stupid plastic things that snap the car together. How to see what I’m looking at. Show me the ropes. So I’m not just helpless. And what’s happened is that Ford motor company doesn’t nearly have the control over me that it did a few weeks ago. I’m rethinking this car. Repenting, seeing something new. Oh, Mary is still in the box that everyone else has for her. But now there’s a way out. She can change things after all. And she certainly will.

And so we wait for our Savior. The one who meets us where we are stuck. In the same old routine, the same thinking, the same little box we’ve been in maybe for years. And says, you know, you don’t have to stay there. There’s a path into something new. We don’t have to see ourselves, or our neighbor, or God, in the same old way. Or other races, or religions, or countries. In the darkness, a light begins to shine. God is coming to our world.

Amen.