

Sunday, December 3, 2017 – Advent 1

Sermon Title: Magnificat

Scripture: Luke 1:46-55

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⁴⁶And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; ⁴⁹for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. ⁵⁰His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. ⁵¹He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. ⁵²He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; ⁵³he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. ⁵⁴He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, ⁵⁵according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

Did you know that Luke’s version of the birth of Jesus is a musical? There are four songs, or canticles, that are part of the first two chapters of Luke’s gospel. It doesn’t say, “And Mary stood to sing wistfully to an invisible audience.” It doesn’t even say that Mary sang. But scholars can tell that these four poetic insertions were likely songs before Luke wrote them into the gospel. This advent season we are going to look at these canticles, which all have wonderful Latin names. Today we are going to focus on Mary’s song, most often referred to as, The Magnificat. The word “Magnificat” is the first word of the Latin translation of Mary’s, “My soul magnifies the Lord!” The words of the Magnificat have been set to some of the most glorious music ever written, so much so the music has overshadowed the fact that Mary’s song is subversive and radical.

It is hard to imagine dear, sweet, meek and mild, Mary singing a rebel song. And yet this is the song she was born to sing. The Hebrew meaning of the name Mary is rebellion.¹ Mary was rebelling against business as usual. Mary was rebelling against Roman occupation and religious elites that had no regard for the vulnerable and powerless. Mary was rebelling against the patriarchy that said she was property and at the disposal of men. Imagine her saying with power and determination, “From now on all generations will call **ME** blessed!”

There is a scene in the movie “Legally Blond” where Elle Woods checks a bulletin board to see if she has been selected for a prestigious internship. She is an unlikely candidate. When she sees her name she says, “Me!” This is Mary’s “me” moment. “From now on all generations will call **ME** blessed!”

The song begs the question, “What kind of God would call her blessed?” Her genealogy is never mentioned so it isn’t her pedigree that sets her apart. She’s nobody special...except that she is every woman struggling to feed her children..she is every woman who has to bury her child because of senseless violence...she is every woman that is silenced, minimized, and disregarded.

Mary’s song is not quaint, it is prophetic. The God she magnifies is the God who cares about those at the margins. She magnifies the God that listens to the cries of the brokenhearted. She magnifies the God that lifts up the lowly and fills the hungry. She magnifies the God that liberates the oppressed.

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https://www.google.com/search?q=Meaning+of+the+name+Mary&rlz=1C1CHBF_enUS706US706&oq=Meaning+of+the+name+Mary&aqs=chrome..69i57j0l5.3205j1j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8

Mary sings a song of justice and mercy. It is no wonder Jesus grew up to be the man he was – look at his mother. He didn't just pop out of the womb with a heart for those who are marginalized. Surely, she sang to him her rebel song that says, "The world is not as God intends!" because Jesus made it his life's work to create the world God does intend called the kingdom of God.

Mary's anthem is hopeful and bold. She isn't buying the narrative that says she is a powerless peasant girl. She isn't buying the narrative that says God has no time for the likes of her. She isn't buying the narrative that says God is on the side of sword wielding, death dealing, rulers and leaders. She isn't buying the narrative that says she is cursed. She isn't buying any of it, because she knows something about God. God is on her side. God has always been on the side of those who groan under the weight of oppression and are trapped in poverty.

Some say she learned some of her song from Hannah. Hannah was a woman that was brokenhearted about being barren, which is about the worst thing that can happen to a woman in ancient culture. She prays night and day at the temple for a child and God hears her prayer. Hannah sings her song. Like Mary, she raises her son Samuel to be a servant of God.

Mary magnifies the Lord because she knows God has not turned his back on her, or the countless nameless and faceless people struggling to survive. The Magnificat inspires those without power or resources to believe that change is possible. God's blessing flows from the bottom up – not the top down.

We would do well to remember Mary's song every time we hear about people being a drag on our economy. We would do well to remember Mary's song every time we hear a story about what it takes to survive when minimum wage won't even cover the rent. We would do well to remember Mary's song every time we see corporate welfare increased and social programs slashed. We would do well to remember Mary's song every time we hear about people who have to flee their homes or watch their families be ripped apart because of the gluttony of those in power. We would do well to remember Mary's song because what it says is that Mary is blessed, and not just Mary mother of Jesus, but every Mary, and every woman, and every human who has to live at the whim of the rich and powerful.

If this sounds a bit political it is because it is political. Luke begins his gospel with these words, "In the days of King Herod of Judea." This is the world in which Mary lives. The world of Roman occupation where Rome appoints the "King of the Jews." And as Jesus' birth nears we are reminded again of life on the bottom of this context. Luke 2 opens with, "In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria." Peasants like Mary were taxed and taunted, living under the power of Cesar Augustus who declared himself to be "the son of God."

Mary knows better. She may have lived in a time and in a land where the rich and powerful declared themselves blessed, but she knows she is blessed because she knows God's M.O. Her song isn't so much about what she hopes or thinks will happen. Her song is about the nature and character of God.

What little I know about how hard it is for people struggling to survive is that it is demoralizing and degrading. Having to grovel for assistance, being turned down for every job, wears on your self-esteem and rattles your self-confidence. You start to wonder if you are cursed or if God is against

you for some reason. You wonder if life will ever be different, if not for you, for your kids. It is for these that Mary sings.

Many scholars have studied the Magnificat. One of those scholars is Raymond Brown. He concludes that Luke didn't write Mary's song. Mary didn't write Mary's song. It was written instead by a group called *anawim* (which literally means, "the poor ones." Brown says the term *anawim* referred to those who "...could not trust in their own strength but had to rely in utter confidence upon God: the lowly, the poor, the sick, the downtrodden, the widows, the orphans." He says this community was people comprised of people who had converted to Christianity. Mary's song was their song and Luke put it on the lips of Mary.²

And she continues to this day to be the spokesperson for those who live at the margins and on the bottom. She gives birth to a revolution.

We have been entrusted with her song – even if we are not in her social location. We have been entrusted with her song to be part of the revolution – where injustice is no more – all have enough – and children have a future.

With Mary we sing.

Amen.

² Nancy Snell, "The Magnificat as a Model for Ministry: Proclaiming Justice, Shifting Paradigms, Transforming Lives," Liturgical Ministry 10 (Winter 2001) p. 33.