

No Christmas Without Mary (Mary's song)

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Luke 1:46-55

And Mary said,

“My soul magnifies the Lord,

and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

for God has looked with favor on the lowliness of God's servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

for the Mighty One has done great things for me,

and holy is God's name.

God's mercy is for those who fear God

from generation to generation.

God has shown strength with God's arm;

God has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

God has brought down the powerful from their thrones,

and lifted up the lowly;

God has filled the hungry with good things,

and sent the rich away empty.

God has helped God's servant Israel,

in remembrance of God's mercy,

according to the promise God made to our ancestors,

to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

The word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

This text comes during Mary's visit with her relative Elizabeth. Miracles were happening inside both Elizabeth and Mary. At an advanced senior age, Elizabeth was going to have a baby who would be known as the prophet of the most-high God.

Mary had already been told by the angel Gabriel that she would conceive and bear a son whom she would name Jesus. Mary was told that her baby boy would be great, and that he would be called the Son of the Most-High. The passage we read from the gospel of Luke is known as the Magnificat or Mary's Song of Praise

Now we know that the baby Jesus is the main star of the Christmas story. God's chosen people had waited generations for the Anointed One/ The Messiah/ The Christ. They had waited generations for a king who would lead with a shepherd's heart and with justice and moral character. They had waited generations for a ruler who worshiped YHWH and YHWH alone.

So, although we know Jesus is the reason for the season, we know that every man is born of a woman. Jesus will be the sole feature in tomorrow's Christmas Eve service that begins at 7 PM and I will see you there. But this morning, we are highlighting many supporting characters in the Christmas story. And, without Mary there would be no Jesus.

In this era of the #metoo movement, women are standing up to say our voices matter and our work matters. We deserve recognition, respect, and equal pay for equal work. In God's sight, men and women are of equal worth. And, God calls women to lead and serve just as God calls men to lead and serve. But this was not always believed to be so.

As a young woman engaged to a laborer, Mary was as unlikely to be used by God to bring forth salvation as were the shepherds. You will hear

from the shepherd in just a moment, but you remember they heard about the Savior's birth from angels while they out in the fields. We have to admit, God works in unconventional ways. It was assumed that the Anointed One, the Messiah, the one who would redeem God's people would be born in a palace, not a barn. It was assumed he would be the son of an aristocrat, not a carpenter. But God's ways are not our ways and God's thoughts are not our thoughts.

Yet, if God can use an unmarried, working-class girl to bring ***The Expected One*** into the world, how might God use us if we were open? Mary was so humbled and grateful that God would select her to assist in the way of salvation. Yet, if God wanted to use us in a special ministry—to bring healing, hope, and understanding, what would our response be? Some of us would say, “***no thank you***”. We wouldn't want to be bothered—no matter how many angels try to convince us. We'd protest saying our calendars are too full. Monday is lunch with the guys/ girls. Tuesday is volunteer day at the library. Wednesday is choir practice. Thursday is medical appointment day and Friday is gym day. Really? Are we really too busy to say yes to God?

I contend the world is waiting for all of us to say yes to God's way in our lives. We are not that busy. And, busy work is not necessarily God's work. Most of us are blessed beyond measure and we are blessed to serve; not blessed to sit.

Mary's song speaks directly to God's unconventional plan. In God's plan, the proud and arrogant will be scattered in the thoughts of their hearts. They will no longer sit in places of prestige and make fun of others. And, the powerful will be brought down from their thrones. We need to be careful how we treat others as we maneuver up the ladder of success.

Those we dismiss, or misuse on the way up will be the very ones pitying us on our way down.

Mary said the hungry will be filled with good things and the rich sent away empty. Conventional wisdom will be turned upside down. Those marginalized will be in places of honor while those who live with abundance will be poverty stricken. I would say that is harsh rhetoric coming from a young girl.

Those sitting in places of power and authority may not have understood that Mary was talking about them. Sometimes in order to get a word of encouragement to those who are marginalized, we have to speak in a language that is unknown to the privileged. People of color know this as codeswitching. Mary knew the language of her people and the language of their oppressors. She knew how to codeswitch and let the downtrodden, homeless, sick, and the food insecure people know it wouldn't always be this way.

Mary let her people know that God had not forgotten them, and their situation would soon be turned around. My sisters and brothers, God wants you to say yes today. Say yes, knowing God can use you and your situation—whether challenging, or complicated, or perhaps you are in a good/ healthy space. We don't have to have a lot of money or be great orators—we only need a willing spirit and a loving heart for God and God's people. Mary said yes to the angels and the Spirit's call and the world was turned upside down. Mary gave birth to the Anointed One, and salvation came to this world. God had plans for Mary and God has plans for us too. Those plans may be unconventional, but the promise of eternal life is worth the journey. Won't you too say yes?

#139 The First Noel vs. 1-4