



University Christian Church – Austin

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The Gospel According to Mary

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Luke 1:46-55

Last week we looked at the beginning of the Gospel of Mark as it pointed out the ministry of John the Baptist and how John's ministry held the seeds of Jesus' ministry that would soon follow. Today we look at the beginning of the Gospel of Luke to how the ministry of Mary, Jesus' mother, bears the seeds of Jesus' ministry as well

As we turn to the content of this passage, known as the Magnificat, this great song of praise to God, if we did not know that it came from the mouth of Mary, meek and mild, we might have expected it from the lips of some kind of political revolutionary! For it proclaims that God is in the process of turning the world's order as they knew it upside down; a reversal of fortunes, in favor of God's preferred way.

Even as we begin talking about Mary, I imagine that there are those of you out there this morning who are already thinking virgin birth, angels visiting.... And are busily trying to

>separate the wheat from the chaff;

>the true historical story from the embellishment;

>Mary the historical woman from the image of Mary that the church has built of her up over the years.

And that is an important critical function to exercise at some times, especially when making theological judgments and determining what is factually true. But I encourage you this morning, for just a few minutes, let us instead, bracket those questions and try to simply enter into the story. Let us see what the story will teach us if we take it simply at face value. Instead of questioning her, let's see if she would question us.

The first thing that we might would note, is the shape and tenor of God's inbreaking that Mary prophesies:

- God's mercy is for those who "fear God," that is, are respectfully obedient to God. She says, "*God* has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; has filled the hungry with good things." This sounds hauntingly familiar to Israel's earlier prophets on the one hand and on the other hand very similar to what Jesus teaches later in the Gospel of Luke when he says,
- "Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you that hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. "Blessed are you that weep now, for you shall laugh." (Lk. 6:20-21)

As a Jewish girl growing up in those heady days in Palestine, she would have been deeply enmeshed in the history of her people so that she would be making connections with her own situation and her forbearers in faith.

For example, remember that in this same revelation from the angel Gabriel in which she was told that she, even though as a virgin who could not normally possibly be pregnant with God's child, she was pregnant, remember that the angel had also told her that her childless infertile older cousin, Elizabeth, was also 6 months into her own impossibly miraculous pregnancy. Perhaps it was the shock & awe of these mighty deeds of God that brought to Mary recollection the words

of another heroine of Israel's faith, Hannah, who was also barren until her old age when God blessed her with a son destined for a major role in Israel's history, the prophet Samuel.

In her own rapturous joy at what God had done in giving her Samuel, as she dedicates the boy to the service of the Lord, Hannah uses words that are most reminiscent of what Mary would sing hundreds of years later. Hannah prayed,<sup>i</sup>

2:1 .... "My heart exults in the LORD; my strength is exalted in my God. My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in my victory.

2 "There is no Holy One like the LORD, no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God.

3 Talk no more so very proudly, let not arrogance come from your mouth; for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed.

4 The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble gird on strength.

5 Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry are fat with spoil. The barren has borne seven, but she who has many children is forlorn....

7 The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he brings low, he also exalts.

8 He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor"

Do you hear the similarities with Mary's Magnificat? There is this excitement that God is in the process of doing a new thing, bringing a reversal of fortunes.<sup>ii</sup>

As we study our faith story deeply we find this continuity, this thread of connection that weaves its way all through the Bible, this sense that the past's trajectory is advanced through God's working in the present generation as they, as we, are ready to be faithful to the call of the Holy Spirit.

And did you also notice that what Mary sings out months before Jesus is born, turns out to be an accurate prediction of what Jesus teaches and demonstrates to those who followed him? Consider the story of the rich young ruler who comes to Jesus and is told by Jesus that to inherit eternal life he should:

“22...Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.”

23 But when he heard this, he became sad; for he was very rich.

24 Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!

25 Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."

26 Those who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?"

27 He replied, "What is impossible for mortals is possible for God." (Lk. 18:22-27)

There they are again, both (1) God’s reversal of fortunes on the one hand and the pointed truth that (2) “what is impossible for mortals is possible for God” on the other.

Did you ever wonder what your life would have been like if your mother had had a vision like Mary did of what it is you should become? It seems that we humans have a tendency to resist our parents’ plans for us when we get to those rebellious teenage years, but perhaps, just perhaps, one such as Jesus might have perceived in his mother's strong intuition and in her recounting of her revelations, His own vocational calling, as one that is high, demanding, dangerous, and quite right for Him.

Follow me here, as we delve into the imagination a little. What if it was indeed Mary’s perception of the work of the Spirit, that both inculcated in Jesus

that earliest sense of his call to mission and as He grew in faith and if it was her continued belief in him that finally cut him free of the constraints that tie the rest of us humans to lives less lofty.

If this were the case, if it was Mary's conviction of who Jesus would become, that provided the booster stage that rocketed Jesus' life out of the gravitational pull of normal human living, does that in any way undermine the heroic character of the decisions and actions that Jesus on his own would later take? I think not. I think a mother with such vision, providing such encouragement, just might be another one of the essential ingredients that was needed in order to launch the course of Jesus as the Christ the Messiah.

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If we look back to the Gospel of Mark we find the mention of Mary, the mother of Jesus, is made only one time. But here in the Gospel of Luke, Mary appears 13 times by name and many other times by pronouns. She is clearly a much more major factor.

In fact, many have said, that Mary in our passage this morning becomes the model of a faithful response to the activity of the Holy Spirit. In spite of the fact that her life would be turned upside down - and probably not for the better - because of her readiness to follow in the way that God wanted her to, she went boldly forward.

I can hear her question us.... Could we do the same? Would we have, do we have, the gumption to put our lives on the line and follow where we hear the Spirit of the Lord is calling us to go?

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Finally, one notices in the demeanor of Mary in this passage; the blessed, peaceful character that flows from one who has given herself deeply and completely to the guidance of the Spirit of God.

This afternoon and evening as we watch the story of Amahl and the Night Visitors develop we will enjoy the music and the movement and in our spirits we will be moved with a fresh appreciation of what it means to give deeply of oneself to the often unclear future that God offers each of us.

Again, I can hear Mary challenge us. Is it possible for a play, an opera, or perhaps a few verses in an early chapter of Luke's Gospel to challenge us to look deeply into our own lives and see if we can find in them that same hopefulness, that same conviction, that same deep down joy that the Gospel According to Mary sings out? Can rehearsing the bedrock stories of faith, lead our souls, too, "to magnify the Lord, and our spirits to rejoice in God our savior."

I pray so, and I believe so, my friends.

Have a Mary, that is M-A-R-Y Christmas.

Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> 1 Sam. 2:1-10

<sup>ii</sup> Hannah says, "The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he brings low, he also exalts. He raises up the poor from the dust." Mary says, "He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty." (Lk1:52-53)