

## St. Mary – Patronal Festival - 12<sup>th</sup>/19th August 2018

Mary's story appears only in Luke's gospel, and in his account there is nothing submissive nor immature about Mary. According to Luke, the Angel approached her with words of great honour: *Hail Mary, full of grace.*

It is Mary's grace that has attracted God's attention. But what *is* grace? It is what Luke shows us in her conversation and her actions – courage, boldness, grit, ringing convictions about justice. Not submissive meekness. Grace is not submission. And the power of God is never meek.

Yes, Mary is startled by the presence of the angel. So were Gideon, Jacob, Jonah, and the shepherds of Bethlehem, to name a few, they who, like Mary, questioned the angel in wonder, doubt, and even resistance. They are noted for their reluctance. Why not Mary? *What sort of greeting is this?* she asked. And the angel obliged her with an explanation. Later, she challenged the angel: *How shall this happen to me, when I have no husband?* God chose a spunky young woman!

Many women in biblical stories appear in *domestic* settings. Sarah is in her tent, baking cakes. Rachel is drawing water at the well. Bathsheba is taking a bath. Martha is fussing in the kitchen. The woman who lost a coin is sweeping the house. But with Mary, there is no evidence of any domestic work on her part. We never find her cooking, cleaning, washing up. The evidence offered us, is her courage and strength of character. What we find her doing, over and over, is traveling, in journeys that involve risks and an element of danger.

Her recitation of the Magnificat is a political manifesto (part of a long Midrashic tradition), delivered fairly publicly, in the home of an official temple priest, who is married to her cousin Elizabeth, who is also pregnant, with John the Baptist. In the radical protest song placed on Mary's lips, there is evidence of deep thought, strong conviction, and a good deal of political savvy.

It is the kind of song that the enslaved Israelites might have sung in Egypt. The kind of song you might have heard on the lips of the exiled Judeans in Babylon.

The kind of song that has been sung by countless people of faith through the ages in resistance, in defiance of empires, slavers, terrorists and invaders:

*[The Lord] has shown strength with his arm;  
has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.  
Has brought down the powerful from their thrones,  
and lifted up the lowly;  
Has filled the hungry with good things,  
and sent the rich away empty. (Luke 1:51-53)*

Mary's Psalm sounded the initial, clear, trumpet call that the coming of the Christ was to be a world-transforming, universe-shaking event.

According to Luke, when Mary sang, she didn't just name those promises but also entered into them. The verbs in Mary's song are all in the past tense. As Mary sings, she recognizes that she has already been drawn into relationship with the God of Israel, the one who has been siding with the oppressed since the days of Egypt and who has been making and keeping promises since the time of Abraham. Mary is now included in God's history of redemption.

Mary's song of resistance is a song in tune with the Lord's songs throughout the ages. It was a song in harmony with the psalms that other faithful followers of the Lord had sung in past generations:

The once-enslaved Moses and Miriam sang this song of resistance when God delivered the oppressed from the house of bondage in Egypt:

*[The Lord] has trumped gloriously;  
horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.*

*In your steadfast love you led the people whom you redeemed;*

*you guided them by your strength to your holy abode. (Exodus 15:1bc, 13)*

The once-barren Hannah, afflicted by Peninnah her rival, sang this song of resistance and deliverance:

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

Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread,  
 but those who were hungry are fat with spoil.

The Lord makes poor and makes rich,  
 he brings low, he also exalts. (1 Samuel 2:4-5, 7)

And the psalmist in Psalm 146:

The Lord sets prisoners free;  
 the Lord opens the eyes of the blind.

The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down;  
 the Lord loves the righteous.

The Lord watches over the strangers;  
 upholds the orphan and the widow. (146:7c-9b)

As commentator Rolf Jacobsen<sup>i</sup> has written:

Throughout the ages, God's people have faced oppression. And in the face of that oppression, God's people have sung God's songs of resistance – songs that carry the old, old story.

*That old, old story tells us that the world is God's good creation, requiring environmental attentiveness;*

*That old, old story concerns miraculous new births to old folk without possibility, because it is never too late to live in the mercy of God;*

*That old, old story is about emancipation from the coercive requirements of Pharaoh and the pressures of quotas for more bricks;*

*That old, old story is about being at the mountain and always again making new covenant that redefines the world as a neighbourhood;*

*That old, old story is about being in an arid place without resources, and watching bread being given in ways we do not understand;*

*That old, old story is about life in a world where gifts are given and neighbours are trusted and the poor are protected and given dignity, where power is kept under the discipline of truth, and war is not learned anymore.*

*The old, old story becomes the new, new song – it threatens the status quo; it challenges the economics of greed; it exposes the politics of exploitation; it questions the church as medicine or habit. It unleashes the power of life into a world bound by death.*

*The new song of Mary is about the old, old story of rebirth, resurrection, transformation.*

*When the old, old story becomes the new, new song, people become free and courageous , enlivened, dangerous and filled with joy.*

A young peasant woman, Mary of Nazareth, mothered God's redemption of humanity. How does this old, old story speak to us? Are we empowered, strengthened, and urged by God to imagine new ways to live....?

A 'single-use plastic-free' way to live? A simple, de-cluttered way to live? A non-violent, interdependent way to live? A kindly, merciful way to live – for both self and other?

This year, in this season of *your* life, do *you* have a new, new song to sing?

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<sup>i</sup> [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=2317](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2317)