

Fourth Sunday of Advent
Saint Dunstan's Episcopal Church, Houston, TX
19 December 2021

MARY'S SONG (Luke 1:46-55)

She is young, she is afraid, and she holds a great secret in her heart. God himself has passed over the great centers of the world, the great cities, the learned societies of the day and has chosen to come to a small village in an occupied Roman territory. God has passed over the wealthy, well-educated, and well-connected women of the day and has come to her, a young girl without much education, without much wealth, without much freedom. She is a woman in a man's world, and a subject of the Roman empire. She is an innocent child in a world of great darkness, great corruption, great sin, great apathy, and great ignorance. She is young, she is afraid, and she holds a great secret in her heart.

The creator of the universe has chosen to become human. The Great I AM, the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the source of everything that has ever been, everything that is, and everything that shall be, has decided to become human by taking on flesh, bones, and skin. To take on the frailty of our human race. She has been chosen as the vessel that will nurture Divinity in her womb as the Divine becomes human. She will give the Creator of the Universe a physical form, and he will grow inside of her, develop organs, take shape, become a tiny baby, grow, move, and one day be born into a human family. The Divine will live a human life, grow in his humanity, and die a human death. God has chosen her to be the mother of the Savior of the world.

The "child she will deliver, will soon deliver her," as Mark Lowry reminds us. This is her secret, a secret she cannot tell anyone because she will be in great danger, and yet, this secret is so big that she must confide in someone. There are secrets too big for a person to carry alone. It is for this reason that Mary "went with haste" to visit her cousin Elizabeth as soon as the angel finished his announcement. As soon as Mary entered Zechariah and Elizabeth's house, the baby in Elizabeth's womb leaped with joy. The baby inside Elizabeth is the first to recognize the baby inside Mary as the Savior of the world. John's faith is a prenatal faith, a faith that is at the core of who he is. He kicks and makes it known that both he and his mother stand in the presence of God himself. At Elizabeth's words, Mary gives us a beautiful song that many consider the cornerstone of the Gospel of Luke. The Theologian Robert Jensen believes that "It could be said that the entire Gospel of Luke is a commentary on this song!" Christ breaks into the world and raises our humanity to God, as he brings down God's divinity to us. Christ breaks in and allows us to break out. Because God has chosen to constrain himself within the bounds of humanity, we are freed from the bounds of our humanity and given the ability to reach out and touch God's own Divinity. This is the great mystery of God's love for us. And this is the very core of Mary's prayer.

Mary exclaims a song that must be repeated over and over again from each of our pulpits: “My soul magnifies the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” This must be the song of the Church today. We gather together to say, “Blessed be God! We rejoice that God is our Savior! Not by our strength will we go on, not by our wit shall we survive, our creative forces will not bring about Divinity to our midst, our creativity will not gain for us the eternity we seek. Blessed be God, for he and only he, is our Savior! Blessed be God who has chosen to save humanity from the inside out. He is Lord and he is Savior and our future depends on him and him alone. Our souls must then proclaim the greatness of the Lord, our spirits must rejoice in God our Savior!

Mary continues, “he has looked with favor on his lowly servant. The Almighty has done great things for me and holy is his Name.” This is also the song of the Church. God has done great things for us. Through his son he has raised us out of our own insignificance and has restored our humanity. God has chosen to be one of us, and what this means is that we are worthy of redemption. God is not done with us. We are not alone, drowning in our own sorrow, sentenced to be forever lost, floundering in our own weakness and our own pain. God has chosen to become human and now we have a great defender, a great protector, a great warrior who stands ready to defend us from our enemy and to restore our humanity. We have been chosen by God for redemption and this means that in Christ we have a new sense of worth and dignity. In Christ we have a new community of loving and caring believers. In Christ we have the sure hope of God's mercy and justice. Because Christ has taken human form, we know that someday all the injustices, oppressions, and burdens of this life will be gone. This is the promise that this child brings to all of us. This is the reason for our hope.

It is time we sing Mary's song again from all the pulpits in America. God truly shows the strength of his arm and scatters the proud in their conceit. God casts the mighty from their thrones and lifts up the lowly. This is a lesson for our worldwide Church. We have become too powerful, too influential, too enamored with our own programs and institutions, and many churches have forgotten that this baby and what he represents is the only reason we come together Sunday after Sunday. In many parts of the world, the Church has paid more attention to building thrones than to caring for people. Mary reminds us today that the thrones humanity builds will one day come to an end, for only God lasts forever, only God's Messiah will last forever. His words will never pass, his mercy will never end, his love will be for everlasting to everlasting. In Christ the lowly are raised to the status of children of God. Those who are in need of God will have their fill. Those who yearn and thirst for God, as the dry land longs for water, will be restored, will be filled with good things, will be given the water of life that never will end. This is the promise to Mary, to us, and to God's Church. Our dependence on God will be rewarded, God himself has come to the help of Israel, God has remembered his promise of mercy, as he promised our ancestors. And God will continue to remember these promises of mercy and will offer them anew to our children and our children's children. This is the promise to generations yet to come. As God has come, he will come gain. As

God in Jesus has been the help of ages past, he too will be the help of future generations. As God in Christ has taken on humanity and has brought humanity to a new identity and a new dignity, he too will continue to be flesh and bones to those yet to come. Christ's humanity is the greatest promise to the children of tomorrow. They too will encounter a God who has not left us to fend for ourselves, but who has become one of us. They too will encounter a God who is on the side of humanity. This is the reason why we must sing Mary's song from every pulpit on the land. Our hope is in the name of the Lord who made the heavens and hearth. Our hope does not lie anywhere else.

Mary's song reminds the Church that Christ is the Lord of the Church and that without Christ we don't have a Church. He is the true promise to Abraham's children and their children forever. He is the one who is God's greatest gift to humanity of all ages. He is the center and the cornerstone of the Church and no construct, however noble and however grand, can ever take the place of Christ as the head of the Church and the author of our salvation. This is what Mary's prayer tells us today. It is God through Jesus who gives victory to those who depend on God for their life, their salvation, and their eternity. Without Mary's boy we have no Church.

It is time we sing Mary's song from all pulpits in America. It is God and God alone who vindicates the innocent, rescues the oppressed, frees the captive, and raises the poor and lowly to a status of children of God. It is God in Christ who remains the only hope of the poor. I pray today that you and I, and the church as a whole, will make ourselves humble, poor, dependent and in need of this Messiah God gives us today. This Messiah is the hope of the poor only for those who consider themselves poor and in need. He will be the Savior only for those who consider themselves in need of salvation. He will be Lord only for those who believe they need someone greater than themselves to lead them the rest of the way.

I pray today that the Church will hear Mary's song and will cry out, "Come, save us Lord, for without you we are lost, desperate, and in need. Come save us Lord for we have no future without you. Forgive our arrogance and come save us Lord! Blessed be your name forever, Amen!"