

“Mary’s Song”  
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 Old Stone Presbyterian Church ~ Lewisburg, West Virginia  
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Micah 5:2-5a

2But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. 3Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has brought forth; then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel. 4And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth; 5and he shall be the one of peace.

Luke 1:39-55

39In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, 40where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. 41When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit 42and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. 43And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? 44For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. 45And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord." 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."

This is the Sunday when we look in through the window of scripture and remember moment when the angel Gabriel announces to Mary that she is going to give birth to Jesus the Christ, leading Mary to travel to see her cousin Elizabeth who is also with child, which leads to the song, the Magnificat.

The pictures, the paintings, most often portray Mary as meek and mild, and demure and watchful. Scripture tells a different story, as I preached a year or two ago, Mary was less meek and mild and more fierce and fabulous- full of the faith of the Hebrew scriptures who taught her about a God of hope and justice. Redemption and Salvation. This is not a pliable, sweet, influenceable teenager.

Episcopal Priest Carolyn Sharp writes:<sup>1</sup>

Her Magnificat is a powerful poem that holds together the grittiness of life on the margins and the resilient hope of those who trust in God. Mary found herself pregnant and not yet married in an ancient culture in which coercive control of female sexuality was a primary measure of masculine honor. Mary faced an uncertain future at best and devastating retribution from her community at worst. Indeed, the Gospel of Matthew is careful to note that Joseph planned to dismiss her quietly rather than expose her to public humiliation (Matt 1:18-19): the latter scenario could theoretically have included stoning for adultery, according to Jewish law. So I don't envision Mary as the radiant woman peacefully composing the Magnificat...., but as a girl who sings defiantly to her God through her tears, fists clenched against an unknown future. Mary's courageous song of praise is a radical resource for those seeking to honor the holy amid the suffering and conflicts of real life.

The Magnificat is one of the great songs of the Bible. Born of the songs of Miriam and Hannah<sup>2</sup>, mothers of the faith, songs giving thanks while casting forth the vision of the almighty, speaking of something that is central to the life of faith, to the kingdom of God, the vision of God for the world, this world, God's world. Justice.

Justice. Not a word that we're naturally comfortable with. We tend to prefer words like giving, generosity, helping, mission.

Those aren't bad things, but they are only one step on the journey to which we are called.

Charity is helping people.

Justice is fixing the system so that the inequalities that created the need for that help don't exist.

Charity is giving someone a bag of groceries because their job doesn't pay enough to provide housing, health care, and food.

Justice is working to create a world where people who work can make a wage that provides basic needs for them and their families.

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<sup>1</sup> Carolyn Sharp. [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/carolyn-sharp/luke-13956-magnificat-for\\_b\\_1146988.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/carolyn-sharp/luke-13956-magnificat-for_b_1146988.html)

<sup>2</sup> Tribble, Phyllis, "Meeting Mary through Luke," *The Living Pulpit*, 2001.

Charity is the rich sharing what they have.  
Justice is not having such economic disparities.

We may need charity in the meantime, but it is not our final destination. Justice is.

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.

Just a few weeks ago, at the funeral service for Philip McLaughlin, Marion Gordon told the story of Philip being his boy scout leader. Leader for the troop that he started for the students at the Bolling School in Lewisburg who had no Boy Scout Troop because of the color of their skin.

Reflecting on those experiences, powerfully, Mr. Gordon shared that, when he was an adult, he asked Mr. McLaughlin why he'd founded the troop.

The reply was that he saw an injustice and a way he could correct it.

It wasn't out of sympathy or pity, it was an active living into the way that the world should be.

As Cornel West has said,  
"Never forget that justice is what love looks like in public."

Or the words of Julie Clawson:<sup>3</sup>

The Magnificat testifies to God's work to reconcile all creation, work that has already begun and will continue forever. Like Mary, we are invited to be intimately involved in this work.

Mary wasn't crazy. She was carrying the hope of the world inside her; she knew that God had entered the world in a dramatic way. This changed everything--but to accomplish the change, the hope had to be proclaimed with assurance. We don't just place our hope in a past event or a future reward; we live into it."

Today, we are reminded that just as Jesus came, and just as Jesus will come again, we are called, and in Advent we are reminded, the Kingdom arrives as we live into it.

But I'm reminded of something else today, as I hear Mary's remarkable words and ponder her amazing willingness to answer God's call.

What was she thinking?

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.christiancentury.org/blogs/archive/2010-12/marys-grammar>

Would any of us, if we were her parent or friend, would advise her to accept God's offer?  
Which is, by the way, clearly the faithful choice.

And how is that true in our own lives?  
When is the faithful choice the one that seems illogical, counterintuitive, or is  
disincentivized?  
And is yet, still, the faithful choice.

Madeline L'Engle writes:

There is also a legend that Mary was not the first young woman to whom the angel came. But she was the first one to say yes. And how unsurprising it would be for a fourteen year old girl to refuse the angel. To be disbelieving. Or to say:

'Are you sure you mean—  
but I'm unworthy—  
I couldn't anyhow—  
I'd be afraid. No, no,  
It's inconceivable, you can't be asking me-  
I know it's a great honor  
But wouldn't it upset them all,  
Both our families?  
There're very proper you see.  
Do I have to answer now?  
I don't want to say no-  
It's what every girl hopes for  
Even if she won't admit it.  
But I can't commit myself to anything  
this important without turning it over  
In my mind for a while  
And I should ask my parents  
And I should ask my-  
Let me have a few days to think it over.'

Sorrowfully, although he was not surprised  
To have it happen again,  
The angel returned to heaven."<sup>4</sup>

But not with Mary. Mary said Yes. More accurately,  
"Let it be with me according to your word."

Mary said yes. Something in her, the image of God knit within her since birth, knew that when it was all said and done, saying yes to God's plan for her life was the right thing to do, that the peace she would find in being closer to her creator would outweigh what she

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<sup>4</sup> Madeline L'Engle, *And It Was Good: Reflections on Beginnings*. Wheaton Ill: Crosswicks, 1983.

was risking by stepping so radically out of the box in which she was expected to live. That the love of God she would allow to enter her now would sustain her through all that was to come, good and bad. Mary must have known. Or at least hoped. We know she was brave enough to listen to the voice of faith.

Nelda Mashburn, you might have known, was married more than once, more than once before she married Art. As was stated clearly in her obituary, Art was her fourth husband.

When I met with them to plan the wedding, I knew she had been married, but not how many times. I asked her what her children thought about her getting remarried and moving to West Virginia. She looked at me with a smile in her eyes and told me that they were fine with it --supportive even-- that this wasn't the first time she'd remarried.

They were used to their mother grabbing hold of happiness when she found it- of knowing that life almost never turns out the way that you think it will and that you can't wait for everything to be perfect to be happy. And so she stood here, 15 months ago, in the front of the sanctuary, and I hadn't even gotten the words of her vows out before she said, "I surely do," loud and clear.

"I surely do."

It might as well have been the words Mary said to the angel,  
"Let it be with me according to your will."

Words with which we should all be more comfortable, in the little things God asks and in the big things God envisions.

Following Mary and her words, her song. A life that wove together—justice and joy.

As Shirley Erena Murray put it in her hymn "A Place at the Table"<sup>5</sup>

For everyone born, a place at the table,  
for everyone born, clean water and bread,  
a shelter, a space, a safe place for growing  
for everyone born, a star overhead,  
and God will delight when we are creators  
of justice and joy, compassion and peace:  
yes, God will delight when we are creators  
of justice, justice and joy!

This advent, may the words of Mary remind us that we, too, can say,  
"Yes, Lord. Let it be with me according to thy word."

Amen.

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<sup>5</sup> [https://hymnary.org/text/for\\_everyone\\_born\\_a\\_place\\_at\\_the\\_table](https://hymnary.org/text/for_everyone_born_a_place_at_the_table)