

The Message in the Mess

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Luke 1: 39-55

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Christmas is only 5 days away! Can you believe it? It is upon us as we speak! Well, I feel like it has been one of my duties all month to slow us all down and remind us that it is NOT yet Christmas yet, and today is no exception. We are still in the season of Advent, and the liturgical Christmas season does not actually begin until Christmas Eve. THEN we can say, "Christmas is here, can you believe it?"

Today we are going to talk about Mary. When we think about or speak about Mary, she is often characterized as meek and mild, or gentle and blessed. Well, we don't really know, but if she did have all those characteristics, I can say that it was *in spite of*, and not because of her lot in life. Mary's life was a real mess.

Mary was a poor young woman—a teenager really, probably around 14 years old when this story was told about her. She was uneducated and pregnant out of wedlock. We don't really know much about her parents and what they thought of her condition at all. I imagine her parents were quite shocked when she told them she was pregnant. Maybe they were embarrassed of their daughter; maybe this is why Mary went to visit her cousin Elizabeth. I remember when I was in high school and if a girl got pregnant, she always seemed to be away visiting her aunt. So here is the picture of Mary I would like to paint for you today.

- She lived in poverty amid a scandal in which she was the main character.
- There were questions at home from her parents and
- There was Roman oppression abroad.
- She was a teenager living out her first pregnancy, maybe with morning sickness and mood swings and cravings.
- She gave birth in a stable with animals all around her and no midwife, no doctor, not even any other women.

Mary's life was anything but peaceful—Mary's life was a mess!

With God, though, there are usually great messages in the messes. The message here is that God always seemed to choose the least likely candidate to do God's work.

- He chose the elderly, fatherless Abraham to be the father of great nations.
- He chose Moses, who never really fit in and was a verbally challenged murderer turned shepherd to deliver God's people.

- He chose a gang of rag-tag slaves to be his chosen people. The little town of Bethlehem to be the birthplace of the Messiah.

God had been choosing the unlikely for quite sometime when it came time to choose the *Theotokos*- the mother of God.

God does choose what is or seems to be the least, the littlest in one way or another.

- God even chose to become little himself. He chose to become a tiny little ovum that would divide and re-divide to become a fetus and eventually a tiny baby.

A tiny baby that would have to rely on his mother and father for several years just to survive. He would need them for food, for shelter and for love. God chose to be born as a baby not knowing how to talk or eat solid food and having to have his diaper changed.

God does choose the littlest, the lowest, the least likely. Maybe this is what Mary finally realized as she broke out into song beginning in verse 46. This song is also sometimes called the *Magnificat*.

As Mary begins her song, we see a different picture of her than I painted earlier. Now Mary is sure, she is confident. The first lines are not those of a shy, timid, meek and mild teenager. I imagine the words of this hymn came gushing out of her mouth as she magnifies the Lord and God magnifies her.

She sang, "My soul magnifies the Lord." Think about using a magnifying glass. What happens? To magnify means to make clear, enlarge, bring into focus or reveal. Is that what you think she meant when she sang those words? That through her pregnancy, God had come into focus, that she had now experienced God in a new and expanded way—a magnified way?

Remember the first time you ever looked through a microscope in biology class? I do. We put a drop of pond water on the slide and looked through those two little eyepieces. A whole new world was opened up! It put me into a whole new relationship with the world I lived in.

If Emmanuel, "God with us" means anything, it means God comes to us, keeps pushing into our narrow, limited, and confined world, giving us an expanded and larger—a magnified world.

That happened to me when I took my mission trips to Guatemala. My visits there and seeing the way Guatemalans loved and worshiped God and life, was like putting not just the world, but God under a microscope for me. It completely opened up my narrow view of God and the world that I held in my life and in my own little world I inhabit every day.

So let's look a little further at Mary's song. The song can be divided into two parts. The first part is about what God has done for Mary, and the second part is about what God will do in society.

You know, Mary's song **is** great news for the *poor*, for the hungry, but what about us? We sit on top of the world's economic pyramid. For us, Mary's word's can and should be absolutely explosive!

She is praising God who will change everything for us! A God that promises to turn our world upside down! No wonder John the Baptist leapt for joy in his mother's womb. He would not be born one of the elite, the mighty or powerful.

So, do we dare sing Mary's song as our song? We don't really want to, but I think we know in our hearts that this great reversal will come. You see, her song is a freedom song. It is not just a song about charity, but a leveling of the social playing field. Mary can see that God will bring deep justice and systemic transformation to the world.

This is a song about comforting the distressed and distressing the comfortable. Mary expects God to not only lift up the lowly, but to pull down the powerful ones as well. The reversal continues into the economic realm—the haves will become the have-nots. Not too comforting and a little distressing for us to hear, isn't it?

William Willamon says that we should watch out! "This God that Mary sings of is a God that is on the move down in the ghettos, making the folks at Merrill Lynch and the Pentagon mighty nervous."

At the very least what we can do about Mary's song today is to see Mary as a leader and model of faith. We can learn from her how to treat the poor. We can learn we are to feed the hungry and clothe the naked, or if you are unable to do those things, you can, at the very least, pray for those who do.

So, even though Christmas may only be 5 days away, we hear Mary's song—an Advent song—a song of hope and expectancy—a song of waiting. This means in Mary's song, her God has a future. This means that Mary's God will bring us a future.

This is the turning point of Advent—not only for Mary, but also for all of us here at First Pres. God comes into the world as we know it, as Mary knew it, to bring in his kingdom. God will turn things upside down; bring down the powerful from their thrones, and fill the hungry with good things to eat.

Mary's life *was* a mess. Many of our lives are a mess and our world is in a mess. But there is a message in the mess. Be careful when you leave here today. Mary's song may just have settled into *your* soul. Be careful, because your humdrum work-a-day world may just be turned upside down. Christ is coming and the possibility of a new world is coming with him!

Let us pray:

Loving God, who comes to us in this season as a baby, help us to see you as you really are. Help us to see you as One who can and will level the playing fields of our life and our world.

Give us strength and give us courage to accept you into our lives today with all your justice and all your grace. Amen.