

## **Sacred Space, Sacred Song**

Luke 1:46-56

December 11, 2022 Third Sunday of Advent *Reflecting the Sacred series*

Rev. Cynthia Cochran-Carney, First Presbyterian Church of San Rafael, CA

*Mary said:*

*“My soul magnifies the Lord,  
And my spirit rejoices in you, my Savior,  
For you have looked with favor  
upon your lowly servant.  
And from this day forward  
All generations will call me blessed;  
For you, Almighty, have done great things  
For me,  
And holy is your name.  
Your mercy reaches from age to age  
for those who are in awe of you.  
You have shown strength with your arm;  
You have scattered the proud in their conceit  
You have deposed the mighty from their thrones  
And raised the lowly to high places.  
You have filled the hungry with good things  
While you have sent the rich away empty.  
You have helped Israel your servant,  
Mindful for your mercy,  
According to the promise you made to our ancestors  
To Sarah and Abraham and  
Their descendants forever.*

*Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months and then returned home.*

Luke 1:46-56

Inclusive Language Bible

There are 4 “songs” in Luke’s story about Christmas. Perhaps they are not songs proper, but they are poetic in nature, something you can see visually when you read your Bible and the words are arranged in poetic meter, rather than in prose paragraphs. A song looks different on the page. The spacing is different. There is open space, sacred space. (1)

The 4 songs that Mary’s, Zechariah’s, Simeon’s, and the angels’. We are focusing on Mary’s song. Mary’s “Magnificat” is so called because when her song – which begins with the words, “My soul magnifies the Lord” – was translated into Latin, “Magnificat” is how the word

“magnifies” was translated. Although I was not lucky enough to study Latin in school, I am relying on those of you who did.

What can this song teach us about Christmas, and why does it matter today? How is this song connected to the Christmas story? Why is Mary’s song important?

### **Story of going to Elizabeth - Holding space, space for the promise to grow**

The song comes after divine messengers visit Elizabeth and Zechariah and then Mary. Elizabeth and Zechariah, settled into retirement, are visited by an angel - You will have child. He will prepare the way for the One, the Christ. John the Baptizer.

Then this young girl engaged to this guy named Joseph, a girl named Mary, who happens to be related to Elizabeth, receives a visitor. God sends an angel to her one day out of the blue, who tells her that she will be pregnant and bear the Savior of all. How can this be? The angels tells her more and about Elizabeth. And Mary answers, “Here I am, the servant of the Lord. Let it be according to me as you have said.”

And then what do you do after you agree to such a thing? After the moment passes and the angel leaves and the nausea sets in? What does a young girl do alone and pregnant with the strangest story, a crazy story, and a blasphemous story? She gets up, packs up and flees to one who knows, one who can share her story, Mary goes to Elizabeth. This was her first move in this Yes-saying, God-bearing life - go be with someone who is also living this reality, someone who is part of the impossible too. (2)

She runs into the house and calls out to Elizabeth. And she doesn’t have to say another word. Elizabeth just knows. She hears Mary’s voice and the baby leaps inside her and by the power of God’s Spirit she knows, and she rushes to Mary and grabs her in her arms, calls her blessed, affirms her faith, and confirms her experience. Mary is filled with such joy, this thing is no longer so terrifying and is even more real, and she sings. And what comes out is a powerful song begun in gratitude and spinning out from herself to encompass the whole earth.

This song of joy doesn’t come from the angel’s pronouncement or Mary’s great personal faith. It comes from sharing the mystery with someone else, from witnessing it to be real in another and having them see it in her. These two women are the church before there was a church.

Her “yes” is providing a Sacred Place for the holy. Elizabeth affirms this mystery that is happening to Mary. And coming from Elizabeth it sounds like better news, powerful promises, it sounds hopeful, exciting and REAL. In one another, God provided sanctuary, the space for the promise to grow. They shared the joy.

**Power of the Song – dangerous** This song that she sings. What is it? Well, one thing we know. It is a dangerous song. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German pastor and theologian who was

executed by the Nazis, called the Magnificat “the most passionate, the wildest, one might even say the most revolutionary hymn ever sung.” Revolutionaries, the poor and the oppressed, all loved Mary and they emphasized her glorious song. But the Magnificat has been viewed as dangerous by people in power. Some countries — such as India, Guatemala, and Argentina — have outright banned the Magnificat from being recited in liturgy or in public. (3)

Too often I think we treat Mary's Magnificat song as if it's like the fake snow and the window dressing of a Christmas display that just makes you feel better about the main attraction, but that's not what Mary's Song is at all.

While Mary never mentions the Roman Empire, she tells the truth by contrasting the way life ought to be with the way life is. And in that Magnificat, you can hear Mary talking about the situation the oppression under which she and her people live and how when God comes to do something. Mighty God is going to lift up the lowly and bring down those in power. God is going to disempower those who are proud. God will empower those who are humble and even those that the hungry, the Holy One will fill with good things. The rich he will send away empty. This is not fake snow that helps us kind of appreciate the Christmas scene a little better. These are Words of Power and words of truth. These words can lift us up.

But there's something else about Mary's Magnificat that's easy to overlook. When we read the Christmas story passages there are quite a few places that are named that are part of the story – Nazareth, Bethlehem, later Egypt. In Luke's gospel Luke tells us on two different occasions where Mary is when offering this Magnificat. She's not in the city, she's not in the town where the Roman military presence might be close by. Twice he describes it as they're out in the Hill Country.

Now Luke loves to name towns and cities even little villages that, but for some reason he doesn't name where they are. He just simply describes it as out in the Hill Country. Even though it's the birthplace of John the Baptizer who's a very big deal in the first century, it's not named, just the Hill Country. Instead of having this Proclamation take place in any City a named city which might therefore suffer the consequences of such bold truth-telling, it is in the Hill Country.

It shows that to speak a word of Truth that points to Injustice and compares what God is doing, what God has done, what God will do, with what we're suffering today, that can be an incendiary thing. It can be dangerous speech. It is speech that we have to pay attention to when we say it and how we say it.

So if you've ever seen Mary depicted in movies or paintings or songs as being this kind of sweet little naive waif who is basically passive in the Christmas story just acquiescing to whatever this strange thing is that God is doing through her, I want you to speak a word of protest against that depiction of Mary. Speak it in the name of Mary's Song here. She's not an

innocent young girl that doesn't know what's happening among her. She's on board. She knows that the birth of the Christ is going to call in to question the Injustice in which she's living and she's ready for it. She's ready to name it. She's ready to join it. (4)

She invites us to join her in making space for the Spirit to grow and transform us and the world. We can proclaim the Christ Mystery. We can offer our lives and our bodies and ourselves to be part of what Christ is doing. We can join that circle dance. Mary song invites us to sing along, to be in this space of waiting and wonder, openness and hope, joy and dreaming and living in the now while being open to fuller vision.

Advent is a season of liminal space where we dwell in the in-between, in that sacred space of change and transformation. Mary's song invites us into this space with boldness & hope.

*We all need to consciously spend time at the thresholds of our lives, and we need wise elders to create and hold such spaces for us. ~ Richard Rohr*

### **Giving and Holding Space** by Bob Holmes

Let us let go of our body's memory, and trauma holding us to a past we can't change,  
And let us let go of the mind that focuses our attention on a future we can't control,  
So that we might inhabit that liminal space between...

Let us give and hold space for each other there  
on the threshold of transcendence and change  
in the thin places of earth and heaven.

Let us be for each other  
light and life, breath and spirit

Let us give and hold space  
in the ebb and flow,  
in the coming and going  
in the guiding and reframing,  
in the tears and the joys

Let us give and hold space for each other  
in ascending and descending,  
in the birthing and in the dying  
in the loving and in the suffering,  
in the building and the breaking,  
between who we are and what we are becoming  
between all duality.

Let us let go, unattaching and disentangling ourselves from our past and future  
Let us give and hold space in the in-between  
and in the here and now,  
on the threshold of time and eternity,  
Let us give and hold space for each other's souls. (5)

- 1) Rev. Mark Davis, "Songs of Justice, Songs of Hope," Blogspot, 11/2022  
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- 2) Rev. Kara Root, "The Reason We Sing," 12/20/09, Lake Nokomis Presbyterian Church,  
<https://kara-root.blogspot.com/2009/12/reason-we-sing.html>
- 3) D.L.Mayfield, Perspective – "Mary's 'Magnificat' in the Bible is revolutionary. some evangelicals silence her.", The Washington Post. 12/20/2018  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2018/12/20/marys-magnificat-bible-is-revolutionary-so-evangelicals-silence-it/>
- 4) Rev. Mark Davis, "Mary's Song," 11/27/22, St. Mark's Presbyterian Church, Newport Beach, CA  
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- 5) Bob Holmes, "The Liminal Space of Thresholds," The Contemplative Monk, 12/9/22  
[https://www.contemplativemonk.com/post/the-liminal-space-of-thresholds?fbclid=IwAR0ig-KqOGJjU5ALDjv3BOzujyKo\\_19vZgK4ku3qfJkurXQnkyfSMTtIGNQ](https://www.contemplativemonk.com/post/the-liminal-space-of-thresholds?fbclid=IwAR0ig-KqOGJjU5ALDjv3BOzujyKo_19vZgK4ku3qfJkurXQnkyfSMTtIGNQ)