

## **Mary's Song (Magnificat): A Canticle for Turning the World Around**

Luke 1:46-55

Dec. 17, 2023 Third Sunday of Advent

*Series: Symbols and Songs for the Season: Waiting with Hope*

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*My soul lifts up and magnifies the Lord!*

*My spirit celebrates God, my Liberator!*

*For though I'm God's humble servant,*

*God has noticed me.*

*Now and forever,*

*I will be considered blessed by all generations.*

*For the Mighty One has done great things for me;*

*holy is God's name!*

*From generation to generation,*

*God's lovingkindness endures*

*for those who revere God.*

*God's arm has accomplished mighty deeds.*

*The proud in mind and heart,*

*God has sent away in disarray.*

*The rulers from their high positions of power,*

*God has brought down low.*

*And those who were humble and lowly,*

*God has elevated with dignity.*

*The hungry—God has filled with fine food.*

*The rich—God has dismissed with nothing in their hands.*

*To Israel, God's servant,*

*God has given help,*

*As promised to our ancestors,*

*remembering Abraham and Sarah and their descendants in mercy forever.*

*Luke 1:46-55 The Voice*

When we come into the Christmas season, we read about the angel coming to visit Mary with the big news that she is pregnant. Then we read in Luke's gospel about Mary and her visit to Elizabeth. Mary breaks forth into song or a poem. It is not prose. Too often I think we treat Mary's song as if it's like the fake snow and the window dressing of uh Christmas display that just makes you feel better about the main attraction.

But that's not what Mary's Song is at all. I want to invite you as you hear Mary's Magnificat Mary's song in some different ways. It begins with the phrase "My soul magnifies the Lord." I read a contemporary version today. While Mary never mentions the Roman Empire, she tells

the truth by contrasting the way life ought to be with the way life is. The way life ought to be with the way life is. And in that song, 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 and haughty and God will empower those who are humble. And those difficult words - that the hungry God will fill with good things, but the rich God will send away empty. The Holy One, Source of Love, Creator of the Cosmos, is turning the world around, upside down. Reversing what we see to what it is meant to be.

This is not fake snow that helps us appreciate the Christmas scene a little better. These are words of power and words of truth. I hope you will take time this week to read Mary's song for yourself and ponder her words. It is a protest song. It is rooted in Hannah's song from the Hebrew scriptures from the book of I Samuel. Hannah was pregnant with Samuel and she too offers a poem, sings a song of how justice and peace and food will be abundant in God's vision of shalom for all people.

Mary sings a song of truth

Mary sings a song of protest and hope rooted in Hannah's song

And there is something else I had not noticed before. There's something about Mary's Magnificat that's easy to overlook. My friend Rev. Mark Davis helped me see this detail. (1) 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 presence might be readily visible. But twice he describes it as - they're out in the Hill Country. Now Luke loves to name towns and cities, even little villages. But for some reason, he doesn't name where Elizabeth and Zechariah and Mary are. He just simply describes it as out in the Hill Country. And 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.

I wonder if Luke's use of that location for this Proclamation to take place instead of a named city points to the reality that the singer of such a song might suffer the consequences of such incendiary truth-telling. People in power don't like that kind of song.

Mary's sings this powerful song in order to speak a word of truth that points to injustice. And she compares what God is doing, what God has done, and what God will do with what we're people are 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 a 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 a protest against that depiction of Mary.

Speak it in the name of Mary's Song. She's not an innocent little waif that doesn't know what's happening in her and around her. She's on board. She knows that the birth of the Christ is going to call in to question the injustice and oppression in which she's living and she's ready for it. She's ready to name it. She's ready to join it. Like Mary, we can proclaim the presence of the Christ. We can be part of what Christ is doing.

Because when Mary talks about what Christ has done what God has done in the past, she shows us how to be part of a faithful tradition and join that tradition. And when she talks about what God is doing, she shows us that faithfulness is participating in what God is up to. Becoming part of what God is doing in the world. And when she talks about what God will do, that's Mary's invitation to you, to me, folks of the future folks, of Mary's future. That's Mary's invitation for you to become part of this song and to join this movement of following the ways of Jesus. And this deeper wholeness of Christ that is already true. We wake up to it. And we live it in our inner life and our worlds and actions. Let's have that kind of Mary Christmas. Amen.

After a time of silence and in response to the scripture reading and the hearing of the word, I invite you to rise in body or Spirit as we sing a version of Mary's song called *The Canticle of The Turning*.

- 1) Mark Davis, "Singing for Justice: Mary's Song," November 27, 2022  
[https://www.youtube.com/live/R0b4\\_EO8CGE?si=5Z0cxf1-IJpd51fo](https://www.youtube.com/live/R0b4_EO8CGE?si=5Z0cxf1-IJpd51fo)