

Advent 4 – Year C

The Magnificat, the “Song of Mary,” is given to us today both as part of the Gospel and as our response to the first reading. I got the hint. The Magnificat is worth our time this morning, this fourth and last Sunday of Advent. There are scholars who think that Luke adapted the text of the Magnificat from the Canticle of Hannah in the First book of Samuel from the Hebrew Scriptures. Both of them begin with praise to God for what God has done for each of these women, and then move to a theme of ... “reversal” – telling of what God has done and will do for all of God’s people.

We have images, thanks to artists over the century – both visual artists and those who composed hymn texts – of a Mary that is meek and mild. We’ll sing very shortly of Mary, “pure and lowly.” An elderly priest friend of mine once preached of the disservice done by these portrayals of Mary so nicely adorned in lovely blue gowns and veils. He asked, “Where is Mary of the sweeping broom? Or Mary of the dirty diapers?” I think, in the Magnificat, we have Mary the radical mystic, telling us what she knows of God.

God, she says, is full of mercy from generation to generation. God will take the mighty down from their thrones and instead will lift up the lowly. God will fill the hungry with good things and send the rich away empty.

This is a world upside down that she is proclaiming. She and the people with whom she lived were living in a world where the powerful had it all, where the poor were hungry, where the rich got richer by taking from the poor. But God, she sang, will remember mercy and the promises made to our forebears. God will turn it all upside down.

This is not Mary, meek and lowly. This is Mary the radical – radical in the real meaning of that word as getting to the root. This is Mary boldly proclaiming the mission of God, the heart of God. And this is no doubt what she taught her son, Jesus.

This vision of God that Mary proclaims is at the heart of what Jesus proclaims as well. Hear the Beatitudes: Blessed are the poor, the hungry, those who show mercy... And when Jesus said, as we heard only a few weeks ago, that “these stones will not be left one on another, no, it will all be brought down” – you can hear the echo of the Magnificat: “He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and lifted up the lowly.”

Mary’s song is, perhaps, a threat to those in power. But it is one of hope for the poor, the lowly, the hungry. It is a song of hope for us. There is a version of the Magnificat you may have heard called “The Cantic of the Turning.” Each verse and the refrain end with some version of the promise that “The world is about to turn.” Yes my heart says. Please God, turn this world around.

I have to confess that there is a part of me, and I venture to say a part of most all of us, that gets some satisfaction from thinking of the powerful being taken down. A part of me likes that kind of “justice” – which is really just pay back. But long ago when I prayed with this Song of Mary, it came to me that once the rich have been sent away empty, then they will be the poor – and then God’s mercy will extend to them also. Once the mighty have been taken from their thrones, they will be the lowly, and God’s mercy will extend to them also. I wonder if I am so ready for that...

This upside-down world, this world turned around, is what we’re praying for when we pray for God’s kingdom to come on earth. This is what we say we are longing for when we pray, “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel!” O Come, O Come, God with us!

But maybe we should be careful about what we pray... Maybe we should reflect on the Magnificat’s proclamation of what is at God’s heart and ask if we’re ready for that kingdom to come. Because it’s a kingdom turned upside down. The lowly will be lifted up – but the mighty will be taken down. And we might not be in the camp we think we are!

My sister told me that her 15-year old son got nothing for his birthday last week. When I asked why, she said that they had planned to buy him a new pair of shoes he wanted that cost \$75. And then he came to her and said there was a girl at school who had crummy shoes and he wanted to buy *her* a new pair of shoes. And my sister was in the position of having to tell him that they could afford to give *him* the new shoes for his birthday, or they could let him buy the shoes for his friend, but they couldn't afford to do both at the moment. And my nephew opted to get the shoes for his friend. Giving you what you *need* may mean letting go of what I *want*. Lifting up the lowly, filling the hungry with good things, may mean being brought down ourselves. I may have to sacrifice, may have to let go of some of the ways I am living in order to help usher in this kingdom of God I pray to come...

God give us the grace to be people of hope, and to be people willing to bring hope to others by living out what we heard from Hebrews, "See, God, I have come to do your will." As we move these last days from Advent to the celebration of the Incarnation, may we commit ourselves again and again to being the hands and heart of Christ in the world. Christ has no body now but ours.

Amen.

- [Micah 5:2-5a](#)
- [Hebrews 10:5-10](#)
- [Luke 1:39-45, \(46-55\)](#)
- [Canticle 15 \(or 3\)](#)