

Singing with Mary

Luke 1: 46-55

And Mary said,

“My soul magnifies the Lord,
⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
⁴⁸ for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
⁵⁰ His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
⁵² He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
⁵⁵ according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

Out of all the Christmas songs we hear, what is your favorite to sing?
Joy to the World? It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year? O Holy Night?
Maybe the circumstances this year, has caused us to sing a different tune:
I'll be Home for Christmas—that one is obvious.
Maybe *Blue Christmas* is more our tune, especially if we lost someone.
Maybe *Let it Snow* since there is little chance of us getting stuck at an airport this year
and it would be fun to make snow angels.

Every year around this time we hear a plethora of songs,
but there is another Christmas song we sing every year: Mary's.
Her music fills the air with vulnerable hope.
Her voice trembles with anticipatory joy.
It's not a song we hear on the radio,
it's not a melody that gets stuck in our heads—the lyrics are often read and not sung in church.
The song Mary sings is less like a Christmas carol
and more like a revolutionary anthem.

The song Mary sings is a song from her tradition.
Borrowed from her all-girl band who have marked God's liberating actions before her.

Mariam, dancing and singing on the other side of the Red Sea on Emancipation Day.
Deborah, who sang as she stood over her oppressor in her combat boots.
Hannah, whose soliloquy filled the temple with praise
after hearing the news of God's special child growing in her womb.

Mary, whose name in Hebrew means "rebellious one," sings of God's rebellion once again:
when the powerful will be brought down and the lowly lifted up,
when the hungry will be given good things
while the rich are sent away empty.

But notice: it wasn't when the angel swooped down
like a comet telling her to not be afraid that Mary sang.
And it wasn't when the angel told her that out of all the people in the world,
God had chosen her that her voice erupted in song.

It wasn't until she backed a bag and fled for the hills to be with Elizabeth.
It wasn't until she was with someone who shared her experience;
until she was in the presence of her community that her soul magnified the Lord.

It makes me wonder how often this is true for us.
That it isn't until we come together in community to share God's promises with each other
that the joy rises in our spirits.
I mean, how could we sing this Christmas, or any Christmas, without our community?
Just look around, or peer at those little Zoom windows with our faces and names on them.
How could we keep singing of Christmas hope and joy without others to share the song with?
It's in part what makes this Christmas so difficult: we aren't together this year to sing.
We miss the choir and we miss each other.

Mary finds the affirmation she needs in her beloved community.
And it is then that she unleashes her song.
Perhaps it is true for all of us.

It was over the summer, at a Moral Monday March when it happened.
Not a very Christmas-y time of year, I'll admit.
Before we took to the streets.
We stood gathered with our signs and collective energy
when a woman with a protruding belly
wearing thick black combat boots marched on stage and grabbed the microphone to speak.
Clearly, she was pregnant. Clearly, she was ready for revolution.

She began rallying up the crowd:
"Do you want justice? Do you desire peace? Are you ready for change?"
Our spirits caught fire, "Yes! Yes! Yes!"

And then I will never forget what happened next.
She closed her eyes, she smiled, and then she began to sing.
Every word was like a contraction,
swaddled in the hope and longing for a new day.
It was as if she was giving birth
to God's liberating Spirit.

A holy hush fell like a fog over the crowd as we listened.
Then one person joined in,
then two,
then we all began to sing...some louder than others.
Our voices accompanied hers, and we became her choir.
It turns out it was quite a Christmas-y moment after all.

Today, Mary sings.
Our voices affirm hers.
We become her choir.

And so may it be
that this Christmas,
despite the circumstances we all must endure,
we still find the hope and the courage and the grace
to sing with her.