



Roanoke, Virginia
December 15, 2024

“Mary”

Sing in Exultation Sermon Series Part III

Luke 1:46-50

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With today’s passage, we find ourselves still in the moment of worship Rev. Link described last week. Two women meet to celebrate their miraculous pregnancies, and their joy bursts out in songs of praise. Last week, *Elizabeth* spoke of *Elizabeth*- the elderly mother-to-be whose child leapt in her womb at the presence of Mary and her unborn Savior. Preacher Elizabeth called her song “A Call to Worship,” and today we hear Mary’s response.

What is striking about the songs is not just their beauty but the source of their joy. Elizabeth’s joy is rooted in the good news of Mary’s child. Mary’s joy is deeper. It is about what her child’s birth will mean for others. Listen for whom Mary sings.

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 lowly state 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 indeed, 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 imagination 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 come to the aid of his child Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
⁵⁵ according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

Mary’s song, often called *The Magnificat*, shows she trusts what the angel Gabriel told her, that somehow the birth of her son will be good news for the poor, forgotten, vulnerable, and oppressed. Her joy is not only personal, it’s also prophetic. Mary sings of her son as a new Moses who God will use to bring about a new Exodus; a great reversal where

- the lowly are lifted up,
- the proud are humbled,
- and the hungry are fed.

So, is it any wonder that through the centuries the poor and powerless have resonated with this song and have venerated Mary. In a world that often seems deaf to their pleading, Mary is the one who notices the plight of the poor and ignored and speaks for them?

Don’t worry, I haven’t lost my Presbyterian marbles. Protestants rejected the *Doctrine of the Immaculate Conception* that portrays a sinless Mary now sitting in heaven as the intercessor for the poor. We don’t pray to Mary or any other saint because we believe Jesus is the only intercessor we need with God. *But*, let’s not dismiss too quickly the devotion many have felt toward Mary. We should take note that the veneration of Mary is especially attractive in those times when the church gets too identified with the state—when the aims of the church are too closely aligned with the aims of those in power.

Consider the medieval world, a time of grinding poverty and immense suffering.

- Never mind what the best theologians are saying,
- never mind the sacrificial service of those in the church who serve the poor,

What seems clear to many is that the hierarchy of the church is closely tied to the hierarchy of the state and obedience to the Lord of Heaven demands obedience to the lords of this earth.

- Kings are crowned by priests,
- armies march under the banner of the cross,
- and the riches of the powerful and influential are seen as God’s bestowed blessings.

Why would Jesus have time for the poor when kings and popes need his ear?

But *Mary*—Mary is different. Mary is the mother of Jesus, and *a mother always has her child’s ear*. The poor trust that Mary understands their struggles because her song proclaims it. She sings

- of the powerful being brought down from their thrones and the lowly being lifted,
- of the hungry being fed and the rich left wanting.



- She is someone who remembers God’s promise to Abraham to bless all people, not just the privileged few.
- She is someone who remembers God delivering slaves out from under the hand of Pharaoh.
- She is someone who has a heart for the plight of those who matter little in the eyes of the rich and powerful because they have so little to give (though everything to lose).
- She is someone
 - you could talk to,
 - pray to,
 - whose heart is willing to be broken again and again.
- And she is someone who will intercede with her son on the poor’s behalf.

Jesus may spend too much time with kings, *but Jesus will make time for his mom*. Mary will bring to his attention the needs of the ignored and remind him of what he himself said, that the poor are to “inherit the earth.” And so those in need pray to a mother whose heart will break for them, and who will sing a song of joy when good news comes to them.

We will not be dismissive then of those who pray to Mary in desperation because, as Mary knew, those are the prayers that God hears. You see, the God who is too co-opted in the affairs of the king is *a figment of that king’s imagination*. Mary’s heart reflects the heart of Jesus because the priorities of Jesus in Heaven have not changed from the priorities Jesus had on earth. Jesus does not become the mascot of political power, despite the best attempt of kings, rulers and politicians to make him that. Jesus is forever the one who gives his life for those who know their deep need for God.

So, what does Mary’s song mean for Christians who are to *bear the image of Christ* and we as the church that is called to *be the body of Christ*? It means that we are called to bear the heart of Mary and of Jesus—that we are to be the intercessors for the poor, advocates for the oppressed, and bearers of good news to those who need it most? We are to offer the sanctuary of worship, the kindness of those who care, and the assistance of those who offer signs of God’s grace. That is why our ministries of outreach and compassion matter so deeply. They are the ways we echo Mary’s song and offer evidence of her joy.

During December, the Sunday School hour for adults has been given to studying the Advent lessons of Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*. At the beginning of Dickens’ story, *Scrooge does not know how to sing Mary’s song*.

- He turns carolers away with their irritating songs of joy.
- He has no sympathy for the poor and blames them for their troubles.
- He finds no joy in good news coming to them but great satisfaction when they die off or are locked away.



Maybe the whole point of the instruction of the ghosts who visit him is to *teach him how to sing*—

- how to sing Mary's song—
- how to sing the song of those who are not impressed by those who hoard their wealth or abuse their power
 - but who are impressed when good news comes to those who need it...
 - and are most joyful when they can be a part of sharing it.

May we always be the church that sings Mary's song.

