

Scripture
Luke 1: 26-56

Mary's Message

Our reading today included the words that Mary, the mother of Jesus spoke, when the angel told her that she would have a baby, and that that baby would change the world. Her reaction, what she said, is called The Magnificat. It's a bit like Martin Luther King's famous "I had a dream speech" except, Mary said it long before he did.

There is a saying that I like about stories of our faith: I don't know if it happened this way, but I know it's true. The actual facts of Jesus' birth, have many interpretations., Still, what we do know is that somehow, somewhere Jesus came in to the world and he lived and talked about God's love for the world in a way that made people experience hope, peace, joy and love as truth, as real, and as being very close to them. That is enough truth for me to follow.

We usually think of Mary as a young, compliant girl, not someone with much will of her own, really not much more than a vessel for God's coming realm. But Mary didn't just agree to birth a child, she agreed to be the first one to sign on for a revolution, a cosmic revolution in which the world would be about to turn. Mary literally put her body and her life on the line. The *Magnificat*, the song in which she sings of God's justice and her part in bringing it forth, is not the soft soliloquy of a puzzled young person with no will of her own - it is a celebration of God's drawing, near - and her role, and our role in it.

Maybe there is good reason God chose this young woman. Do you remember the faith you had when you were young, when you still thought you could change the world? I do. It is one of the reasons I try to keep connected to young people because they still believe the messages angels or rather God brings them, they not only believe them they are more willing to accept the mission. They still believe they can be a part of changing the world.

Mary has to be fearful in this moment she has been called upon to be a part of altering the despairing ways of the world and yet she can't help but accept the mission. I think it was in August sometime when we as a family were driving back home after a quick visit with some friends in the city. I was tired and feeling a bit run down when The song Angel by Sarah Mclachlan came on and suddenly I could hear Mary in this moment singing with a longing to be a part of changing this broken world.

"Spend all your time waiting
For that second chance
For a break that would make it okay
There's always some reason
To feel not good enough

And it's hard, at the end of the day
...and maybe
I'll find some peace tonight
In the arms of the angel
Fly away from here
From this dark, cold hotel room
And the endlessness that you fear
You are pulled from the wreckage
Of your silent reverie
You're in the arms of the angel
May you find some comfort here”

Now the reality is this song is written for a desperate moment when a friend dies of a heroin overdose but McLachlan says she wrote it for every person who finds themselves in a desperate struggle longing to hear the voice of God. Mary takes a very different route in her battle with the reality of life than the individual this song was written for but when I heard the lyrics I imagined this young girl singing in desperation for her world to change and suddenly the angel appears with the message and she is empowered to accept the mission to be the change in the world.

In the Magnificat Mary's words rouse us from fear and anxiety to taking our place in the turning of the world.

“My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.

Luke's is the only gospel in which Mary's story appears, and in his account there is nothing submissive nor immature about her. According to Luke, the Angel approached her with words of great honour: Hail Mary, full of grace. Many artists paint the angel kneeling, in recognition of the honour given to her. The angel is [clear]; the honour is for the grace that is distinctly [Mary's]It is Mary's grace that has attracted God's attention. And what is this grace? It is what Luke shows us in her conversation and her actions – courage, boldness, grit, ringing convictions about justice. Not submissive meekness. Grace is not submission. And the power of God is never meek. Many women in biblical stories appear in domestic settings. Sarah is in her tent, baking cakes. Rachel is drawing water at the well. Bathsheba is taking a bath. Martha is fussing around in the kitchen. The woman who lost a coin is sweeping the house. But with Mary, there is no evidence of any domestic work on her part. We never find her cooking, cleaning, washing up. The evidence offered us is her love of adventure. What we find her doing, over and over, is traveling, in journeys that involve risks and an element of danger.

Her recital of the Magnificat is a political manifesto, delivered fairly publicly, in the home of an official temple priest.... In Mary's manifesto there is evidence of deep thought, strong conviction, and a good deal of political savvy...

Mary, wanted by God, according to the angel, for her bold, independent, adventuresome spirit, decides to bear a holy child – for a bold agenda: to bring the mighty down from their thrones; to scatter the proud in the imagination of their hearts, to fill the hungry with good things and send the rich empty away. This is Mary: well-spoken, wise, gritty.

Traveling alone, like every prophet before her, she sets out on her first journey, to her cousin Elizabeth's house, to declare her agenda. There will be more journeys: to Bethlehem; to Egypt and back; to Jerusalem when Jesus is twelve; to Jerusalem when he is crucified.

She gives birth in a barn, lies down with animals, and welcomes weathered shepherds in the middle of the night. She is determined, not [docile]; free, not foolish; holy, not helpless; strong, not submissive. She beckons women everywhere to speak out for God's justice, which is waiting to be born into this world.¹

As it is in every message from the messenger. Mary is told you are loved and favoured by God. Accept that, believe it and now go bring that message of love and hope and peace to the rest of the world.

It is the same message for us today. In a time when racism, and misogyny, and fear of the immigrant and prejudice against people of other faith and colour is rampant, when peace-denying activities are on the rise, each one of us needs to find in our own song of resistance, and a song of solidarity with the sacred desire for justice, for hope, peace, joy and love to reign.

We can spend so much time wishing things were not the way they actually are. Our ability to creatively see how God might be working *within* our undesired situation is diminished by all the energy we spend on the denial or passively waiting for things to change *for us*. Peace comes when we accept *what is* and are able to use our energy to live into the *what's next*. Instead of waiting for things to be more peaceful, we need to ask how can we be the ones to offer more peace?

All annunciations in the Bible are about communicating something of identity. Mary is called "favoured" by the angel - but what the angel is telling her is far from what we usually expect to be a "favour"—she is put in a precarious position and ultimately her son is executed... and yet from our perspective we can see how favour was hers. Are we in predicaments about which we cannot yet see the blessing? Peace comes only with humility, not grandiosity and fame; peace comes with struggle to know the "other"—to listen and abandon our preconceived notions about another in order to see them, hear them, know them better. Elizabeth prophesied at the sight of Mary. So Elizabeth becomes a "messenger" as well. The annunciation is retold for emphasis. We are called to tell the story again and again of the Holy born as human in this world

¹ **(No More Lying About Mary)** December 3, 2015 by [Nancy Rockwell](http://www.patheos.com/blogs/biteintheapple/no-more-lying-about-mary/)
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because it contains within it that which assures us of God's presence among us. Mary becomes a messenger, offering a song of justice and peace on earth accomplished when the oppressed are lifted up.

Meister Eckhart, a 13th Century mystic wrote: We are all called to be mothers of God – for God is always waiting to be born. There is urgency now in that waiting, a time for us to decide how to be the voices of peace in our world. May God give us each a song, and may we sing with the courage and grace of Mary.
Amen²

² sermon adapted from Mary: Turning the World Luke 1: 46-55Rev. Debra Bowman, Ryerson United Church Dec. 11, 2016