

Mary's Song

On an early morning near the beginning of a new millennium, a young woman stands outside her home in the pre-dawn light, waiting for the rising sun to crest the distant hills. As it does so, its warmth washes over her and she is certain of what she will do. She hurries inside to prepare for a journey.

The young woman, of course, is Mary and she will travel to the hill country to visit her kinswoman, Elizabeth. She will travel with a small caravan headed into the hills – travel alone would be far too dangerous. She is not afraid, but prudent. Life is more precious than ever, precious beyond description. Earlier, she had made a momentous decision. Now she has much to consider. The life she anticipated will be changed, her relationship with her family, friends, and neighbors will be diminished by shame. She will be shunned by many. Most crucial, what will Joseph do? During her travel and her time visiting Elizabeth, she will pray and think of what lies ahead. This journey is the beginning of a life-long journey committed to the Coming One. She is wise in knowing she needs the counsel of someone she trusts.

In about five days she reaches the home of Elizabeth and Zechariah. Upon entering their home, travel-weary but at peace, Mary greets Elizabeth and receives in return a beautiful prophetic blessing, that is confirmation of all that Mary has said yes to, considered, and prayed about for days as she walked.

“Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!....And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken

to her from the Lord.” The blessing by Elizabeth brings forth from Mary an unforgettable song of joy and prophecy.

Blessed is Mary who believed. Blessed are we who believe. Believe in the words Mary sang: the Mighty One has done great things for me and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation... He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty ... in remembrance of his mercy...

This prophecy is still being fulfilled today. As in Mary’s time, there are those who doubt God will fulfill the promises given, doubt the Christ child even came. War, privation, and oppression seem to be everywhere. If looked at long enough, that appears to be the prevailing condition of the world over – up close and distant. And there is doubt because the promises seem to us too long in coming, or were misunderstood from the beginning, or they are not for our generation. The prophesy is as spoken – from generation to generation.

Mary is so often thought of as Mother Mary, meek and mild conjuring up a picture of someone a bit retiring, timid even, and not given to forceful expression. Surely, we misunderstand what meek and mild means or perhaps we do not recognize the real power of love in true humility and kindness. For Mary sings a song powerful in joy! A powerful song of revolution. A song of prophesy of what God is doing and will do in the world. So powerful was and is her song that the Magnificat

is banned in some places as too dangerously revolutionary. It was revolutionary then, and it is now.

In the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer: "...it is the most passionate, wildest, one might even say the most revolutionary hymn ever sung." Revolutionary in three ways: "he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts" – a moral revolution; "he hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble and meek" – a social revolution; "He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he hath sent empty away" – an economic revolution.

Theologians from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, to William Barclay, to Oscar Romero have seen the power of God's justice in this song of joy and prophecy. Others also have understood the revolutionary power inherent in this song of joy and praise in the prophetic words that promise a new beginning. So much so that India, Guatemala, Argentina, Chile have banned the Magnificat from being recited or sung in liturgy or in public.

It may be more comfortable to think of Mary as only meek and mild, but God surely chose someone with a profound love and faith that would engender the courage and strength needed for what was to be. Mary did not know what lay ahead – not even the travel to Bethlehem. She saw the immediate future in the need to reveal her pregnancy to her family (and there was Joseph to consider.) She could surmise what would follow that, but not much more. What she had was a fearless love and in faith in God, and trust for the future. So, it is with us, when we are faced with a significant decision, and chose which way to go; if we are wise, we

will seek out a trusted counselor with whom we can consider what lies ahead, what changes must come – both large and small – knowing that we cannot foresee all that will come. The unknown future we give in faith to God trusting his promises of grace and mercy.

To the three revolutionary aspects of the Magnificat that Bonhoeffer names, I would dare to add a fourth – joy. Revolutionary joy - not happiness, a passing emotion and satisfaction – revolutionary joy born of steadfast belief in God's promises being fulfilled, joy in the love of God, and in faith in God's mercy and care, that bestows strength, gives courage in the most daunting and fearful of circumstances, and frustrates all that would steal hope from the human heart.

Mary had a fierce devotion in her love of God. A love that keeps the flame of hope and life alive, and the desire for God's mercy and justice. Feed the flame of godly love – it is a fierce flame that will sustain in the most abysmal circumstances and eventually overturn even cruel oppression. Mary had her soul filled with just such a love, she knew it and she sang of it. The Magnificat is magnificent in its beauty and joy and the power of God's love. Say it, pray it, believe it. Amen.