

Music. We sing throughout our worship service, we sing in the car, and we sing carols during the holidays. It all makes me wonder: “why did humans start making music?” Some say it could have been some sort of mating call. Others think it might have been a way to scare off predators. Yet a recent study of songs from around the world came to an interesting conclusion. Co-author Thomas Currie says, “The results show that the most common features seen in music around the world relate to things that allow people to coordinate their actions, and suggests that the main function of music is to bring people together and bond social groups. It can be a kind of social glue.”<sup>1</sup> To me, that “social glue” makes sense. At a Childish Gambino or Madonna concert perhaps we can be drawn in to others. When we sing in church we acknowledge our collective participation in the work of God. Yet, songs also function to incite something in us.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://mentalfloss.com/article/65853/music-developed-bring-us-together-says-new-study>

And incite is just what Mary's song is trying to accomplish in today's Psalm. Although we heard it out of order today, the Gospel reading I just read actually sets the stage for the Psalm that we sang earlier. Before we get too far, it's helpful to have some context on Mary. It's easy to make Mary out to be the pure, gentle, perfect mother. In reality, as one theologian notes, "she's a ... teenage girl. Someone with no power in society; someone already betrothed to a man probably many years her senior (and probably without her consent). She's got brown skin and dark hair and eyes and she's living in an occupied territory." In the midst of this complicated situation as an unwed pregnant teen, Elizabeth calls Mary blessed, which probably wouldn't be my go to word in this situation. And to be clear, it's not like #blessed on social media, which has turned blessed into meaning: "look at me" or "I'm so lucky." No, instead Elizabeth called her blessed as in "holy" or "set apart." And then Elizabeth says something that makes Mary bursts out into song. And Mary starts singing a song that's, well, a bit intense. She says, "God is gonna turn this world upside down

and I'm going to be a part of it." She says, "God is going to save us not just spiritually but physically. God is going to free us from our oppressors, give the poor what they need, and turn the tables."<sup>2</sup> It's a protest song or sorts against the status quo.

And where in the world does this teenager get this stuff from? I can imagine Mary's mother saying "kids these days with their crazy ideas." Well, it turns out that Mary wasn't the first one to sing this song. In fact Hannah in the Hebrew Scriptures, or Old Testament, says pretty much the same thing.<sup>3</sup> And this song, that Hannah and Mary sing – it's kind of a chart topper. It's a well-known song in Mary's time.<sup>4</sup> It's like Adele's "Hello" of the Jewish world.

However, what gets me the most about this unwed, pregnant, dark skinned, teenage mother is that she doesn't see herself as an

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.shannontlkearns.com/mary-the-bad-ass-mother-of-god/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Samuel+2&version=NRSV>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.workingpreacher.org/brainwave.aspx?podcast\\_id=696](https://www.workingpreacher.org/brainwave.aspx?podcast_id=696)

anomaly, but rather she sees herself as a part of something larger.<sup>5</sup> And she is a part of something larger. If Mary's response recorded here is any indication, we can imagine that Jesus probably grew up with protest songs as his lullabies. Jesus was taught that God's action will turn this world upside down.<sup>6</sup> As one preacher puts it: Jesus was taught that God works against the unjust systems of our world that want to measure our worth in dollars. Jesus was taught that God rejects a world where the powerful rig the system against others.<sup>7</sup> And so then it's no accident that Jesus's very first sermon in Luke would sound a lot like his mother. For Jesus unrolls the scroll and says he's come to bring good news to the poor, to set captives free, to give sight to the blind, and to let the oppressed go free.<sup>8</sup> Which sounds pretty similar to Mary, and to Hannah for that matter. It sounds like even if Jesus is not singing about it, Jesus might just be a

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<sup>5</sup> [https://www.workingpreacher.org/brainwave.aspx?podcast\\_id=696](https://www.workingpreacher.org/brainwave.aspx?podcast_id=696)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.shannonlkearns.com/mary-the-bad-ass-mother-of-god/>

<sup>7</sup> [http://s3.amazonaws.com/mychurchwebsite/c841/advent\\_3b\\_12-14-14\\_marys\\_song.pdf](http://s3.amazonaws.com/mychurchwebsite/c841/advent_3b_12-14-14_marys_song.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+4>

momma's boy who is affirming the same thing his mother and his ancestors did from the very beginning.

So, is Mary's song today more than early Jewish karaoke? Does her song have influence? Do songs really have the power to turn the world around?

Sure they do. The civil rights protestors knew it. As they sang songs like this one (plays "We Shall Overcome"<sup>9</sup>). Any ideas what that one was? "We Shall Overcome," which was sung when so many in society didn't give them a chance to advance their cause of justice, let alone triumph.

Or how about this one (plays "Blowing in the Wind"<sup>10</sup>). Any one know that one? "Blowing in the Wind" written by Bob Dylan and sung here by Peter, Paul and Mary. "Blowing in the Wind" is a

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RJUkOLGLgwg>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ld6fA04idal>

protest song of sorts that asks rhetorical questions about freedom, war, and peace.

The protesters in Leipzig in 1989 also new the power of song. For several months preceding the fall of the Berlin wall, the citizens of Leipzig gathered on Monday evenings outside a church to sing. Over two months their numbers grew from a little more than a thousand people to more than three hundred thousand, then to over half the citizens of the city. There they sang songs of hope and protest and justice, until their song shook the powers of their nation and changed the world. Later, when someone asked one of the officers of the East German secret police why they did not crush this protest like they had so many others, the officer replied, “We had no contingency plan for song!”<sup>11</sup>

Songs can be powerful. Songs can bring a change. And I think Mary got it – she knew how ridiculous her situation was. When

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.davidlose.net/2015/12/advent-4-c-singing-as-an-act-of-resistance/>

Mary was caught between the false dichotomy of despair and optimism she reminds us through her song of another way – hope. Hope reminds us that although the circumstances are dark or difficult, we look beyond ourselves for rescue and relief. We look towards hope so that we might hear again and anew God’s promise to hold onto us. It’s Mary’s protest song that says hope in God reigns supreme.<sup>12</sup>

And today our task is to see how Mary’s song, that was Hannah’s song, and became Jesus’s song, can become our song. How can we be brought together – to become that social glue and to coordinate as God’s people?

In this time of year that grows physically darker – can we look depression in the eye and not ignore it, but hopefully (not optimistically) engage it? Can we hold and mourn for that which we’ve lost – friends, family, jobs, security, independence – and

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.davidlose.net/2015/12/advent-4-c-singing-as-an-act-of-resistance/>

move beyond despair into hope in God? Standing next to all that overwhelms in this holiday season can we open our mouths and participate in a biblical song of protest – to protest the limitations of society and also to protest the limits of ourselves? What does Mary’s song incite in us today?

My dear friends, I pray that as we look at Mary’s song today we recognize the hope she holds. In our song, might we be reminded that we are loved? In our singing can we realize that we have more value than what the world cherishes? In our communal song can we look towards God’s incarnation as the world being turned around? Today we hold up the words and actions of a pregnant teenage girl who becomes the bearer of hope in both word and action - an unwed, powerless girl who becomes the theotokos, or the God bearer, to the world in a new way. Thanks be to God for her witness. Amen.