

Fourth Sunday of Advent
Wicker Park Lutheran Church
Rev. Jason Glombicki
December 24, 2017

In honor of the many Christmas cards and letters that have been written this month, I'd like to take a moment to write a letter to someone important in my life.

Dearest Mary, mother of God, the Theotokos, meaning "God-bearer,"

You have not only been an encouragement to Martin Luther, but you have been a transformational force in my life. Even your name inspires as it comes from a version of the name Miriam, meaning "bitter" or "rebellious." And we both know that a name is more than an identifier. Names communicate, influence, and shape the world. After all, the Center for Disease Control would not have spent their time trying to, at their worst, ban words or, at their best, suggest alternative words unless words have power.^{1,2} And your name, Mary, spoke truth to power.

Yet, you are often misunderstood. It saddens me that we sometimes view your body as a vessel and nothing more. We believe that you were quiet, humble, receptive, submissive, and meek. We forget that you consented to God's vision. For our God recognizes that all people, even you as a vulnerable, unwed, teenager, must consent to a fetus in your womb.

¹ <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2017/12/16/trump-administration-reportedly-prohibits-cdc-from-using-words-like-transgender-fetus.html>

² <https://www.npr.org/2017/12/16/571329234/trump-administration-reportedly-instructs-cdc-on-its-own-version-of-7-dirty-word>

I cannot begin to imagine what that conversation with the angel was like for you. I don't want to mansplain³ away your experience. Oh, and in case that word doesn't translate to Greek, Mary, mansplain is when a man tries to explain away a woman's experience. Anyway, the point is that I see myself in your story.

Mary, did you know that something transformational was going to happen with just a few words? Of course, you did! You challenged that angel, saying "how could this be?" How could it be that you were to bear a child? You didn't ask for it but, nevertheless, you received something life-changing. A child, regardless of its state of divinity, is a life-changer. That baby impacted your attitudes, your schedule, your home, and your life. Your entire trajectory changed because of that child. And while I don't have a child of my own, I know that revelations or the beginning of something new can change everything. When I came out as gay, my relationships changed and so did my path in life. When I became a pastor, a weekday 9am to 5pm schedule was no longer possible. I get you, Mary, with just the words "gay" and "pastor," I too wondered "how could this be?"

Yet, Mary, that is not the only thing you've taught me. In fact, it's probably the least influential thing. If I were to really think long and hard about how you've impacted my life, it would be how you've revealed the way that God acts in my life. When I take a step back from your story and peel back the layers of censorship and whitewashing, what I discover is transformational. I look at your life, Mary, and it was...depressing. I mean, girl, you were poor. Like, real poor. You and Joseph couldn't even afford to pay to birth your baby in a proper place. You were a woman stuck in a man's world with no respect. You were young, living in a time when maturity meant everything. No offense, Mary, but you were nothing important. You were just another cog in the

³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mansplaining>

wheel, dragged to Bethlehem because of a new tax law, on the brink of being a single mom, carrying a bastard child, and then you laid your first born in a feeding trough. Mary, in the eyes of the world, you were nothing special. You did not have a single ounce of the world's favor.

Yet, Mary, you of all people, you, Mary, had favor with God. You had support and kindness from our loving God. You had sympathy from a God who lifts up the poor and liberates the oppressed. You, Mary, knew what I often forget, namely that our God's anthem is one of a great reversal. You saw it in the history of your people, and with those angel's words, you realized it again. You knew that our God is one who breaks apart the satisfied. Our God takes the ones who make and live above the rules and force them to live by their unjust rules. Our God who fills the hungry with local, organic produce. And, our God who gives the rich a 100% tax rate. For you knew that our God has a long history of turning the world upside-down, and that ain't gonna stop today.

That, Mary, is why I am thankful for your witness. I'm grateful that you remind me of God's character. And even more than that, when I'm feeling content, you remind me of those in need, and when I feel trapped, you remind me of God's liberation.

Well, Mary, I'm almost out of paper. So, let me summarize. Mary, for me, your soul has magnified the Lord's goodness. You were blessed. The Mighty One has indeed done great things for you... and for me. Truly, our God is holy.

With love and thankfulness for your witness,

Pastor Jason