

The Feast of Mary, Mother of Our Lord

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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August 18, 2019

“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my savior, for you, Lord, have looked with favor on your lowly servant” (Luke 1:46-48, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*). This is the beginning of today’s reading known as the Magnificat. It’s a song of praise sung by Jesus’s mother. It’s Mary’s bold declaration of faith. And, it seems oddly out of place to me. But first, let’s set the biblical scene:

An *angelos*, that is Greek for “messenger” or an angel, came to Mary. And, by the way, there are no wings mentioned here, or in all the gospels for that matter. Those angels with wings are a completely different genre of biblical literature. Anyway, a messenger, without wings, came to Mary. This messenger told Mary that she will conceive a son. And, she’s shocked, because, you know, the whole virgin thing. But, if you look closely at the text, she’s NOT pregnant, yet. The text says: she *will* (future tense) conceive. So maybe that will come when she loses her virginity? Nevertheless, before Mary’s shocked face wore off, she learned that her much older, and perhaps post-menopausal relative, Elizabeth, was pregnant. So, Mary consented to having Jesus inside her – after all, a women’s consent is Biblical. Then, Mary went to see Elizabeth. Upon greeting Elizabeth, the baby in Elizabeth’s womb, who is John the Baptist, did a little kick, which Elizabeth called a “leap for joy” and so Elizabeth blessed Mary. And, finally, we get today’s musical number. All good?

So, with that background, here’s the whole odd, out of place thing for me. It’s not the wing thing, or Mary not being pregnant yet, or the consent thing because all of that is

just reading the Bible; rather, I'm confused by Mary's joy. After all, she seemed oblivious to her situation. Mary was an unwed, fourteen-year-old, Jewish virgin, who would soon be pregnant with a bastard child. Jesus was going to be conceived by a woman and a gender-neutral spirit or, historically speaking, maybe even a feminine spirit. Either way, it's not a masculine spirit, and the spirit and Mary aren't married when Jesus is conceived. (Gosh, it's like reading a Lifetime series script for queer people!) Anyway, Mary's life was over, her childhood was done, and her innocence was halted. Then, on top of that, Mary had an old relative that, statistically speaking, was going to have a risky pregnancy. Add in that Mary was living in an occupied territory under the military rule of Rome bearing more stories of conquest and oppression than stories of "upward mobility." Let's be honest, Mary was a textbook example of what some would call an unwed, welfare mother who would be a drain on the system.

In the midst of all of that, at a time when it seems like it should have been everyone for themselves, Mary did something that I don't always do well. Mary chose to make space in her world, in her life, and in her very body for something unknown. And, if you're like me, when living in a 21st century city, space is exactly what I want to claim.

It feels like there isn't enough space on my calendar, not enough space in my apartment, and not enough space on my phone. And, because space is limited, we often want to hold on to what space we have with an iron grip. We grab as much space as we can find by buying the newest technology. We take as much physical space as we can with our homes, our cars, and our purchases. As a nation, we clear out vulnerable environments for consumable goods; we fill limited air space with more than our share of carbon emissions; we use our military might and financial resources to take more land for our country. As a people, we hoard, we take, we grab,

and once we get what we want, we hold it close. For, we have been tricked into believing that God cannot provide enough for all. So, in our delusions, we hold onto more than we could ever use and we waste the excess. Statistically speaking, we throw away roughly one third of the food produced for human consumption globally. We take up more and more by tossing single-use materials into landfills that can pollute ground water and release toxic gases. We rob future generations from land so our plastic can decompose for thousands of years. As a people, we gobble up and consume limited space.¹

Yet, Mary knew that God's tendency is to make space. As a Jewish girl she learned of this space-making God – a God who heard the cries of the childless family of Abram and Sarai and made space for them to be blessed with numerous descendants, a God who heard the oppression of the Israelites in Egypt and made space for them to immigrate to a prosperous land, and a God who heard the cries of Hannah and made space to liberate her crushed people. Mary knew that God always makes space for those who are considered deplorable and undesirable. Mary knew that God's action was and is always in favor of those at their lowest low, so sure, Mary's situation was far from great, but she knew that this was the moment where God works best. So, Mary makes a bold, spiritual move. She completely re-oriented her life to partner with God in the act of making space for those with none. Mary became what Byzantine Christians have called "the container of the uncontainable."² She, most literally, made space within herself, in her life, and in her future to allow for God to take on human form so that justice and peace might fully reign.

¹ <http://www.johnsrefuse.com/blog/bid/328025/20-Horrifying-Waste-Management-Statistics-and-Facts-About-Landfills>

² <https://liturgy.co.nz/container-of-the-uncontainable>

And, Mary's example reflects God's being, and it gives the opportunity to be space-makers. We are encouraged to realize the space we take and the ways we can share space with all of creation. And, this space making, is more than a "kitchy" call to re-evaluate our daily life. This is a call toward a complete reversal. It's a push to recognize that our calling as people of faith is to prioritize the lowly, the hungry, the persecuted, and the marginalized. This prioritization is in how we offer our full selves, all that we are, all that we have. It is learning to make space to intentionally lose ourselves and to become something new. It's similar to the ways that Mary became a parent. For, when you become a parent, everything that you do as a person fundamentally shifts. It's not a little tweak, it's a life-changing movement. So too, God's work often requires more than a tweak, it requires a full shift so that our churches, government, and institutional policies favor the weak and marginalized. It's a full shift of our lives to make the priority of our existence less about securing wealth, power, and privileges for the few, but rather, that we find a leveling of our distribution.

That leveling will not be comfortable. As Mary says, it will feel like the rich walk away empty handed as some of their tax dollars go to better support the poor. It will feel like those with full bellies starve as they lose their favorite imported wine and cheese so that all can have nutritious food. It will feel like we disproportionately talk about black and brown lives as they flee death instead of discussing the privileged lives of white citizens and that may feel nothing less than white genocide. But, the thing is, all of this is God's reversal to preferentially liberate the poor. It's Mary's song, it's Hannah's song, it's the Biblical song, and, most importantly, it's God's song. This song is *not* a tweak. This song is an overhaul that will feel like the world is spinning off its rocker, but that, friends, is what God's movement has always looked like in the world. It's good news

for the poor, and a challenge for the rich. It's a place where space is opened for all, and it's never ever been billed as easy for those who take up the most space.

So, friends, I've got to wrap this up and get us moving onto the life-giving meal at this table. At this table, we're strengthened to do this ridiculously hard work of transforming our way of thinking from scarcity to abundance. For, our God has given us abundant gifts beyond measure at this table, in this place, and in our lives. Gifts that are given for us to share. So too, God has given us the prophetic example of Mary, who reminds us that we have a God who notices and responds to the oppressions of the world. A God who will stop at nothing to bring eternal life for all people. Thanks be to God. Amen.