

Sermon 23.12.24

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Psalm 89:1–4

I will sing of your steadfast love, O LORD, for ever;
with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations.

I declare that your steadfast love is established for ever;
your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens.

You said, 'I have made a covenant with my chosen one,
I have sworn to my servant David:

"I will establish your descendants for ever,
and build your throne for all generations." '

Selah

Luke 1: 46b-55

And Mary said,
'My soul proclaims your greatness, O God,
and my spirit rejoices in you, my Savior.
For you have looked with favor
upon your lowly servant,
and from this day forward
all generations will call me blessed.
For you, the Almighty, have done great things for me,
and holy is your Name.
Your mercy reaches from age to age
for those who fear you.
You have shown strength with your arm;
you have scattered the proud in their conceit;
you have deposed the mighty from their thrones
and raised the lowly to high places.
You have filled the hungry with good things,
while you have sent the rich away empty.
You have come to the aid of Israel your servant,
mindful of your mercy -
the promise you made to our ancestors -
to Sarah and Abraham
and their descendants forever."

SERMON (watch this [Video](#) first to understand the sermon)

“My heart rejoices in the LORD;

My strength is exalted in the LORD” (1 Samuel 2:1)

Do you recognize those words?

Those words were not sung by Mary, but by Hannah, a thousand years before Mary arrived at Elizabeth’s doorstep. Hannah - the mother of the prophet Samuel - who, after birthing a son, sings a song of divine majesty and power.

Likely that song of Hannah’s was sung by generation after generation of women, becoming a classic in the Hebrew tradition. A song that found its way deep into their hearts and minds.

Hannah’s hymn of power casts God as a master of reversals.¹ And those are the words Mary remembers.

Hannah sings that God raises up the poor from the dust, and Mary sings that God lifts up the lowly...

Hannah sings that God breaks the bows of the mighty, and Mary sings that God brings down the powerful from their thrones.

Mary is singing in the tradition of Hannah, AND applying Hannah’s song to her own situation.

She’s also singing about the larger pattern of redemption that’s seen throughout history, and ultimately about the creator of that pattern; the God of reversals.

The God of reversals - the one who turns the world upside down, or rather right-side up - lifting the lowly, dethroning the mighty, and bringing a new world into being.

Mary perceives that God is not only doing something wonderful - wonderful for those without power - God is doing something wonderful YET AGAIN, continuing and developing the ancient pattern of old, and setting the stage for the days to come.

The Divine has written, is writing, and will continue writing this revolutionary pattern of love and mercy. For those with eyes to see, the pattern is visible - Mary sees it, and so like Hannah, she sings.

¹ [Understanding Christmas - Part Three: Heart of the Matter](#)

Hannah's song is the framework for how Mary makes sense of what looks like bad news, but is really good news - a cause to rejoice. Mary is thinking *through* scripture - interpreting the present through the lens of the past story.

The old stories, the old songs, help us to sing new ones.

By all outward appearances, Mary's situation is perilous. But her song of joy flows from a wellspring deeper than the surface of things. And she doesn't rejoice alone.

No sooner had the angel Gabriel left her - telling her she is to be the mother of God, than Mary packed her bags with haste and left her home, and her fiance, for an extended stay in the hill country, with her cousin Elizabeth.

Elizabeth was another student of the tradition. Her joyful greeting of Mary 'blessed are you among women' echoes ancient words spoken about Jael and Judith, two women famous for the roles they played in the liberation of Israel. With this greeting Elizabeth is also thinking THROUGH scripture - casting Mary as another liberator, like Jael and Judith.

So when Mary sings, there's a chorus singing with her - there's Hannah, there's Elizabeth and Jael and Judith, and generations and generations of women throughout history - all encouraging Mary in her willingness to be a part of God's creativity - bringing new life into that time of darkness.

Giving her the courage to trust in this God of reversals - and to sing of the new life that is stirring in her.

Mary trusted this God of reversals, and must have passed that on to her first born child - for we hear the echoes of Hannah, Elizabeth, Mary in Jesus' sermon on the mount, where the poor are blessed, blessed with the Kingdom of God! Where those who mourn are comforted; where the meek are told they will inherit the earth.

Jesus knew the power of trusting in this God who turns the world upside down.

We read these stories, year after year, - so, we, like Mary, are able to see the patterns of the God of Reversals at work, in and through us.

This season of Advent and Christmas isn't just about remembering and celebrating a birth that happened over 2000 years ago.

It's about saying yes to new life.

So for us, regardless of male or female - how do these stories allow us to see new life being birthed through us?

All of this ritual - the lighting of the tree; the increasing of light in this time of darkness by the lighting of candles. We do them, again and again, so we can learn to *make room for the Christ in Our Time*.²

We, each one of us, are all called to give birth to the fullness of the Light of God – Christ—in us.

We are meant to grow into our birthright as sons and daughters of God, revealing the image and likeness of the Creator in us. Jesus came to show us how to do that.

That's what this season of watching, waiting, preparing is for - so we can be ready for new life to be birthed through us.

In our Voices of the Congregation this morning, we heard stories of extraordinary love- songs, like Mary's, that see God at work - songs, stories of love that reached beyond the bounds of the expected. And yet those stories were of ordinary people. People who showed up, and in practical ways said 'we see you; we love you'.

The God of reversals works through us - and in us. Like Mary in our story today, who in the midst of a perilous situation, was able to see God at work - we heard from Joyce, Nathan and Kathleen - stories of how, when they were in need - physically and spiritually, the unexpected visitors showed up and blessed them.

Love was born in those moments. Small, creative acts of love. Kids taken to the pool so Joyce could rest, allowing new life within her to grow... Nathan being welcomed into a home to heal...Kathleen waking up to find a new friend, reading scripture in a foreign tongue.

Like Mary; like Elizabeth and Hannah and the many voices that came before, who saw the God of Reversals at work, turning places of danger and loss into something unexpected - making space for new life - we, too, are surrounded by these unexpected acts of love.

We each bear the light. Carry it within us. We each have the potential, like all those unexpected bears of Light and Love, to bring into this world something new. Into this world that needs as much light as it can get right now.

Take a moment, consider - what new life, what creative ways of love, are growing in you?

How is the divine Light seeking to be born in and through you?

² [Giving Birth to Christ in Our Time | A Whole Heart](#)

Resources:

Matthew Bolton's Brave New World Podcasts (especially [Understanding Christmas - Part Three: Heart of the Matter](#))

Commentaries on the works of Meister Eckhart

[Giving Birth to Christ in Our Time | A Whole Heart](#)

[More from Eckhart on Our Birthing and Mary's Birthing of the Divine - Daily Meditations with Matthew Fox](#)

Richard [Rohr 12/18/23](#)