

## **“Mary’s Song”**

Luke 1:46-55

Sermon by Rev. Dr. John M. Best to the First Presbyterian Church of Battle Creek  
The Fourth Sunday of Advent, December 20, 2020

Shocked at Gabriel’s message that she would conceive and bear a son.

Mary responds, *“Here I am, the servant of the Lord. Let it be with me according to your word.”*  
(1:38)

Then sings this song. Read Luke 1:46-55

### **This song did not just pop into her head.**

With the help I think of Luke the gospel writer,

she draws from the Song of Hannah in the second chapter of 1 Samuel.

**Hannah** had been barren a long time.

When she finally gave birth to Samuel in her later years,

She dedicated him to the Lord.

She gave him into the hands of Eli, a man of God, to raise.

It was Samuel who would later anoint the first kings of Israel, first Saul, then David.

### **Hannah gave Mary her opening line:**

Hanna sings: *“My heart exults in the Lord; My strength is exalted in my God.”* V. 1

Mary sings: *“My soul doth magnify the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”*

Hannah sings: *“Talk no more so very proudly.*

*Let not arrogance come from your mouth,”* v. 2

Referring to the village gossips who spoke among themselves  
About her barrenness.

Mary sings: *“God has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.*

*Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed.*

*God has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.”*

Hanna sings: *“The Lord makes poor and makes rich; he brings low, he also exalts.*

*God raises up the poor from the dust. Lifts the needy from the ash heap.*

*To make them sit with princes and inherit the seat of honor.”* (vv. 7,8)

Mary sings: *“God 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.”*

**Mary’s song is not some flash of inspiration but draws from a deep well of scripture.**

**She gives in the song a glimpse into the future reign of her son.**

Singing: *“God has brought down the powerful from their thrones.”*

**Herod the King at the time,** had built the temple to honor God,  
a coliseum in Caesarea, to honor Caesar,

and a massive mountaintop fortress at Masada to honor and protect himself,  
he had all bases covered.

This powerful ruthless king however would forever be remembered  
for his lust for power, for his paranoia,  
for his slaughter of the innocent children to secure his power  
when he heard of Jesus' birth, of which Mary sings.

**Mary sings:** *"God has brought down the powerful from their thrones.*

Power is not a bad thing. It can be used for the good or the bad.

People with power sometimes, maybe often, think that they are accountable to no one.

**Mr. President meet Mary.**

**She sings,** *"God has brought down the powerful from their thrones. He lifted up the lowly."*

One Advent I went into Manhattan to visit a church member in the hospital there.

As it was Christmas shopping season,

I took the opportunity to window shop, walk through Manhattan's stores.

I first went to **Tiffany's** on 5<sup>th</sup> Ave.

Remember I grew up in PA shires of Brogue and Dry Run.

I noticed that Tiffany's lists no prices on any of their items.

And everything seemed to be behind the counters.

Like shopping for a Mercedes-Benz,

If you have to ask what the maintenance costs are

You shouldn't be asking.

I looked down at my 25-year-old now 35-year old J.C. Penny overcoat  
and moved on.

I went on to **Saks on 5 Ave.**, the prices there at least were listed.

There you could actually touch the merchandise.

I found one men's evening robe particularly nice to touch,  
wonderfully soft and smooth.

Then I saw the price tag--\$895!

Who in their right mind would pay that much for a robe?

**Christmas shoppers meet Mary!**

**Mary sings,** *"He lifted up the lowly, and filled the hungry with good things,  
and sent the rich away empty."*

God smiles when rules, policies and charities support the poor,

And frowns when the rich greedily stack the deck for their benefit.

God desires that working people get a living wage.

that all people have access to medical care not just the privileged.

God requires it or surely the rich will be sent away empty.

**Congress, Legislatures, County Commissioners, City Councils, meet Mary.**

**Then there are the compensation packages of CEOs, Elite Professional Athletes!**

M. Stafford, quarterback with the Detroit Lions has a five-year contract  
worth \$135 million dollars, \$27 million per year.

When he signed it he became the highest paid quarterback for a week or so.

Weeks later surpassed by Matt Ryan of the Atlanta Falcons, for \$30 million per year. Only to be surpassed by Aaron Rodgers, \$33 million per year, \$100 million guaranteed I did some figuring on Aaron Rodgers Tax savings on the new federal tax savings plan.

His tax savings at the 37% rate, compared to the previous 39.6% rate, on such a salary is \$858,000. Not his tax, his tax savings.

Not counting his State Farm commercial income.

It would take a pastor working full time in this Presbytery at Minimum Terms of Call 19 years to earn what Aaron Rodgers saves on taxes in one year.

**CEOs, NFL superstars meet Mary,**

*“He lifted up the lowly, and filled the hungry with good things,  
And sent the rich away empty.”*

**Biblical Scholar Sharon Ringe notes** that a leveling, rather than reversal, is in view

as God’s action moves us to a common middle ground —

as *“an economy marked by competition is replaced  
by an economy of generosity in which all have enough.”*<sup>1</sup>

In other words, a prideful world where winner takes all is transformed into one in which all have a place at the table.

This is Luke’s vision for the world:

the humiliated are restored to their rightful place  
and the prideful must make way for others.

The question is, how do we experience that kind of transformation?

**Theologian Wendy Farley highlights the importance** of finding a balance point between pride and humiliation.

When, by the power of God’s Spirit at work in our lives,  
we are unhooked from pathologies of selfishness and self-negation,  
we discover that we are capable of being compassionate and just-seeking

**“God bearers, like Mary.”**

As we discover this, she writes, we can dismantle the polarities that bounce between self-inflation and self-negation.

God’s Spirit empowers us to discern this balance,  
enabling us to become compassionate and justice-seeking God bearers —  
people who live by the Great Commandment,  
striving to love God and to love neighbor as self.

It is important to note that suppression of self-love is not what is required,  
but rather love that is rightly ordered,  
for *“only those who love God above all else can love God’s creatures,  
including themselves, as they should.”*<sup>3</sup>

As we listen to Mary’s song, perhaps we can overhear the good news of God’s leveling work within and among us, enabling love of God, love of others and love of ourselves.

And hear God’s saying to us what Gabriel said to Mary.

If this hope of a savior is to happen, it will happen through you.

You will conceive hope by the Holy Spirit.

You will carry this seed and give birth to it.  
You will take responsibility for protecting this child  
when threatened by powerful forces.  
You will raise this child to love justice and pay attention to those over looked.  
You will watch as this child matures, ministers and is beaten down,  
And you will sing when he rises again in glory.

God seeks to use us to flip the script  
to bring Christ and his ways to life in this community and in this world,  
to turn the tables of power where they are abused,  
to brighten a struggling neighbor's spirits,  
to put a song in their hearts.

Like Mary, we may not feel so important,  
but God calls each of us to carry the seed of hope for the least,  
for the forgotten, for the unheard.  
And God looks with favor on our lowly ordinary servanthood.  
God's plan is unfolding, and it includes you, each of us!  
You and I, we did not parent the historical Jesus of Nazareth.  
But we carry and must bring forth Christ into the world.

**So that all may sing**

*"My soul magnifies the Lord.  
And my spirit does rejoice in Christ my Savior."*

<sup>1</sup> “Luke” (WBC) (Westminster Bible Companion) by Sharon H. Ringe

<sup>2</sup> “The Wounding and Healing of Desire: Weaving Heaven and Earth” by Wendy Farley

<sup>3</sup> “What We Were Made For: Christian Reflections on Love,” by Sondra Wheeler